

WOMEN WHO SEEK

DENISE ROBINS



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DENISE ROBINS' NOVELS

Times :—"Miss Robins writes with surprising
quality and dash."

HEAT WAVE
IT WASN'T LOVE
THE ENDURING FLAME
LOVE WAS A JEST
HEAVY CLAY
DESIRE IS BLIND
WOMEN WHO SEEK
SEALED LIPS
THE PASSIONATE FLAME
JONQUIL
THE INEVITABLE END
WHITE JADE
THE DARK DEATH
THE MARRIAGE BOND

WOMEN WHO SEEK

BY
DENISE ROBINS

"What is the love of men that women seek it?"
—STEPHEN PHILLIPS, *Marpessa*, i. 74.

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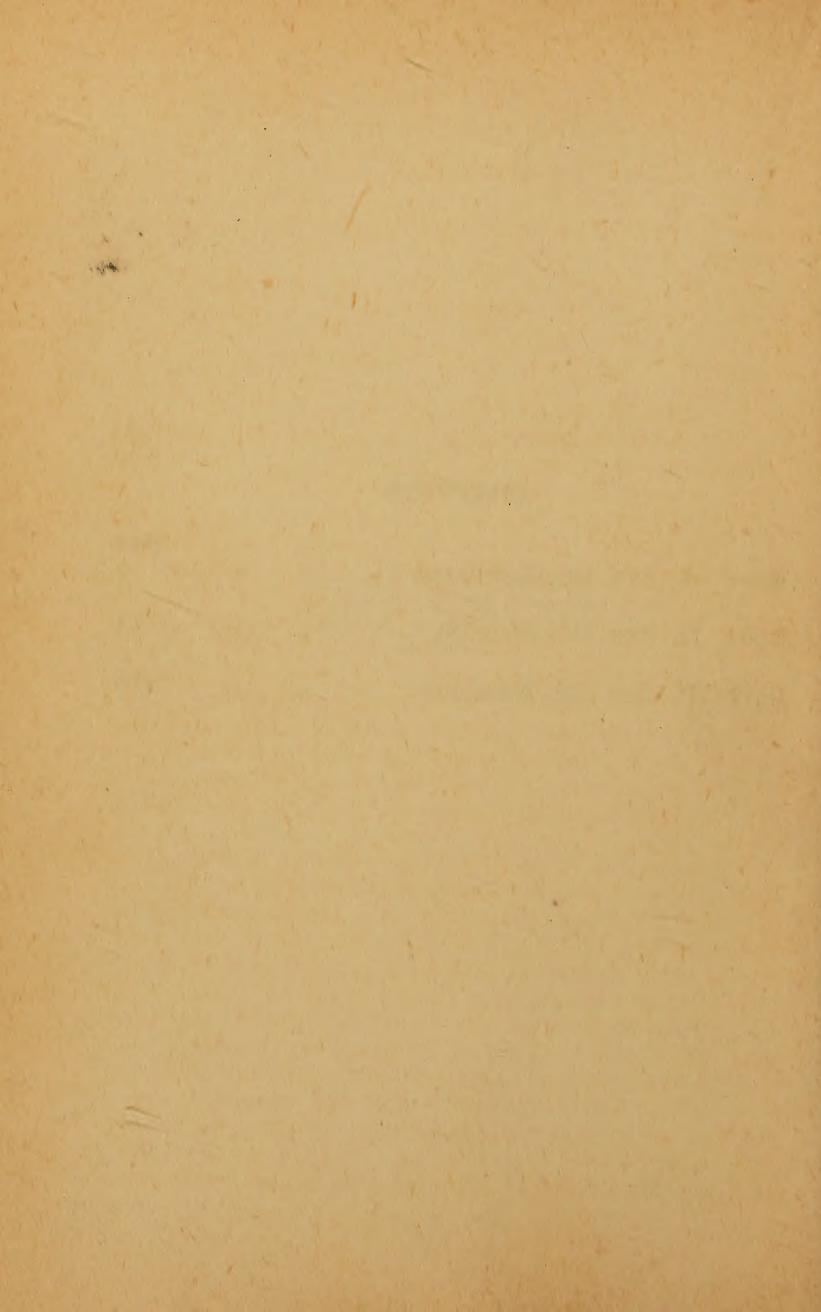
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To
A. H. R.

*The characters in this book are all
imaginary, and have no relation
whatsoever to anyone bearing the
same name.*

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BOOK I

EVE AND LAWRENCE

CHAPTER I

I

It had been raining all night.

At two o'clock in the morning Regent Street presented a melancholy and deserted appearance. The pavements were wet and shining in the lamplight. The gutters ran with muddy water which gurgled into the drains. The sky was starless, and heavy with cloud. On either side the wide thoroughfare, which was free from traffic at this late hour, the big shops, barricaded and shuttered, looked like painted scenery on a stage—lifeless and unreal.

A policeman, muffled in his oilskin cape, walked slowly down the street on his beat. So quiet was the wet September night that the footsteps of the policeman echoed plainly from one end of the street to the other. Now and then he paused, hands gripping his belt, to watch a solitary taxi or private car roll along the road homeward. The headlights flashed and passed. Then silence and darkness again.

Suddenly, from a narrow alley leading out of the main thoroughfare, four young people emerged, hanging on to each other's arms, laughing and talking. The policeman stood watching the little crowd with indifference. He knew where they came from. One of London's most select, *recherché* night-clubs was tucked away in that narrow alley—the *Pompadour*. It had been raided twice. A year ago it had been called "*Chez Raoul*." It had had its licence taken away. Now the name had been changed cheerfully to the *Pompadour*, and it was doing well.

The four young people who had just come out of the club walked down Regent Street toward Piccadilly Circus in a row, arms linked. They were all in excellent spirits.

The two men were in evening-clothes and wore Burberrys. The girls picked their way along the wet pavements daintily on high-heeled silver shoes. One wore an evening cloak of Chinese-blue with a skunk collar ; the other a black velvet coat. Both showed a good deal of slim leg in gossamer silk stockings. Both had smooth shingled heads—one very dark ; one a chestnut-brown.

The girl with the dark hair and Chinese-blue cloak was not strictly sober, although she could not strictly be called drunk. But she had had enough. She laughed hysterically at everything everybody said and at what she said herself. She was a very pretty girl, not more than twenty-one, with eyes as blue as her cloak, and a round baby face. Her cheeks, at the moment, were flushed with wine and tangee-rouge. Her laughing mouth was a bright, startling vermilion. She clung to the arm of the younger of the two men—a boy fresh from Cambridge, whom the party addressed as "Bobby."

"Hold me up, Bobby," she kept on saying. "I feel all wobbly in the knees."

"Rot," said Bobby, squeezing her arm. "You're as sober as I am, Poppy."

He turned to the girl on his other arm. She was rather more silent and subdued than the rest.

"What about you, Eve?"

"Oh, I'm quite sober," she said gravely. "I hardly had anything to drink. I can't, you know. It makes me feel so awful. One cocktail and I'm well away."

"Lucky girl," said the tall man who walked on the outside, close to the curb, and was the senior member of the party. "I wish one cocktail had that effect on me."

"Oh, you're a hardened sinner, Hammond," said Bobby Richards. "You fellows who've been out East seem to be able to drink till all's blue, and don't feel the worse for it."

"Eve is to be envied, nevertheless," said Lawrence Hammond. "Hers is the cheaper and better way."

Poppy squealed with laughter, and again implored Bobby to hold her up. Eve suddenly leaned forward and frowned at her.

"Shut up, Poppy—you're making an awful row."

Poppy choked and gulped.

"Oh, my dear, I can't help it. I assure you I don't

want to laugh till I cry like this. All my eyelash black is running down my cheek."

"Poppy, you're simply marvellous!" exclaimed Bobby. "I'm rather in love with you."

"Then stop a sec. while I wipe my eyes," said Poppy, with another hysterical laugh. "How much farther is this beastly garage where you've left the car, Bobby?"

"Only round the corner," said Bobby.

"Two steps," said Hammond. "If you feel too inebriated to walk it, Poppy, stay here on the curb, and Eve and I'll go and fetch the bus for you, if Bobby doesn't mind."

"Oh, you darling, Lawrence; do," said Poppy.

"Yes, do," echoed Bobby, and paused beside Poppy. He was a moon-faced youth with horn-rimmed spectacles, limpid eyes with girlishly-long lashes and a slim graceful body. He was never out of temper, danced like an expert, lisped slightly, and used the word "marvellous" in every other sentence. He had no father, a mother who had spoiled him all his life, and enough money to waste. He had no ambitions. His life at the 'Varsity had meant pleasure and not work. Just now he was at the stage when nicely-brought-up girls bored him, so he sought the companionship of actresses, or girls like Poppy Crawford, who had been nicely brought up, but did everything she could to disguise the fact. Poppy was without intellect; she was merely intelligent where men, money, or dress were concerned; she was amusing, and she openly declared war on the morals of the older generation. Bobby thought her "marvellous."

Bobby had organised this little party to-night. Originally he had intended to take Poppy out to dine; then to a theatre and the Pompadour, *à deux*. But Poppy had telephoned to say that she was bringing a friend with her—a girl who lived near Haywards Heath, where Poppy also resided—and had asked him to find another man to make up the fourth.

Bobby had found Lawrence Hammond. Lawrence was a member of Bobby's club—thirty-one, travelled, amusing in a rather dry, cynical fashion. He had the thin dark face of a satyr; a face browned by tropic suns and lined by experience. He was of medium height, and

moved extraordinarily well. He played excellent bridge, told witty stories with the air and ease of a born actor, and was altogether good company.

Bobby—ten years his junior—admired him. He did not know much about Hammond's private life. He had only known him since the summer, when Hammond had returned to England from Malma. He seemed to have no relations and few friends, and lived in rooms in Half Moon Street. It was apparent that he had very small means, and was going back to a job of some kind in Malma, just before Christmas. He was not at all communicative about his affairs, and to Bobby he was something of a mystery—but all the more interesting for that. Bobby had played bridge with him at the club several times, and, having come to the conclusion that Hammond was a "marvellous fellow," had attached himself firmly to him.

Lawrence Hammond found the boy a bore, but tolerated him good-humouredly. All men liked Hammond. They called him a "good fellow." Women were intrigued by his satyr-like face and shrewd tongue, and the charm of manner which he could exert when he chose. But no woman had ever held Lawrence Hammond for longer than an hour or a day. He had no desire to get married. Sex was not so much part of his existence as cards or wine. Freedom meant more to him than anything. His main trouble was extreme indolence. He could never have worked in England. Even the work he did, perforce, on a rubber estate in Malaya bored him, but he found life out there preferable to an existence in some dreary office over here.

He had not particularly wanted to come out with young Richards this evening. He was not interested in theatres. He had thought the show they saw—full of sex-psychology—dull in the extreme, although Bobby had seen it twice and pronounced it "marvellous." Dancing at the Pompadour on a few square inches of floor seemed to Lawrence a poor amusement.

"A guinea's worth of hugging from one corner to another," he described it.

He knew Poppy Crawford. He had met her with Bobby before to-night. And he had met her type in every part of the world, round which he had travelled

twice. Ultra-modern ; rather deplorable. Hard as nails under the frills. All right to pass an hour with. You did not need to bother to entertain her. She entertained you.

The other girl he had not met until to-night. Her name was Eve Walton-Evans, and she lived near Haywards Heath. According to Poppy the Walton-Evans had recently bought an estate there, and Mrs. Walton-Evans had called on the Crawfords, thereby establishing a friendship between the girls.

"Eve is an absolute duck, but her parents are fearfully old-fashioned and trying to make life a curse for her," Poppy had informed the men. "I'm trying to cheer her up."

Lawrence Hammond wondered, cynically, how much harm Poppy Crawford would do in the process of cheering up Eve.

Hammond found himself slightly interested in Poppy's friend. He had no use for extreme youth and innocence ; and less use for blatant corruption. But the complex was always entertaining, and Eve Walton-Evans was a mass of complexity.

He had watched her during the evening, and amused himself by dissecting her in his cold, blasé fashion. Here was a girl—a mere child of nineteen—with all her natural instincts warring against the conventionalities and creeds of her upbringing. She was mentally struggling against the bars of convention which caged her family. At any moment, Hammond reflected, she would slip straight through those bars and spread her wings. She was consumed with curiosity to see the world outside the cage. She had only a vague idea of what life had in store—ideas culled mostly from books which she read, or from people whom she met and studied.

Hammond saw in her an echo of Poppy Crawford—even to the use of Poppy's slang and the adoption of Poppy's free-and-easy manner. But under it all she was not a Poppy Crawford. She was something much more intelligent and sincere. Poppy, by instinct, was bad. Eve Walton-Evans, by instinct, was good, but she tried to be bad because she thought it smart and up-to-date. Hammond, watching her keenly through the evening, saw her

frown and flush when Poppy made some particularly flagrant remark. He knew that Eve—the real Eve—shrank from such complete lack of reserve. But the next moment she was laughing, and capping Poppy's remark with a daring one of her own.

He thought it rather a shame that Eve should be under the influence of a girl like Poppy. In the right hands she could become something much finer. She had charming traits. And she was charming to look at, with her well-shaped brown head, rather pale fine skin, and small straight nose. Her eyes were set wide apart—hazel-green; quite beautiful between thick brown lashes. When she was talking and laughing animatedly Eve's eyes were almost like those of an impudent boy—honest, challenging, gay. In repose they were what Hammond called "*triste*." They looked as though she wanted something badly, but knew not what she wanted.

"They are undeniably attractive eyes," Hammond told himself. "They might be the eyes of a great saint or a great sinner. The child has possibilities. She is a little stubborn—one can see that from her strong chin—but I doubt if she is very strong-willed on the whole. I think there is weakness in the mouth."

Weakness in the mouth, yes. But a man might look long at Eve's mouth and lose his own strength of will. It was a fascinating mouth, rather large but perfectly shaped; the lower lip full, the upper lip attractively short. An impulsive, passionate young mouth. Certainly the child had depths in her . . . and very passionate depths, too. He wondered how far a man could go with Eve; how far she would let her own impulses and passions master her. She had been flirting desperately with him the whole evening. But would she do more than flirt? He wondered, a little stirred by his own thoughts, but more coldly interested in the dissection of the girl's character than in the actual sex-thrill of it.

He doubted if she had ever been kissed with passion by any man. Quite possibly she wanted the experience. Lawrence Hammond asked himself if he wished to teach her. It might be quite interesting to watch the play of her emotions. She was not a hard little devil like Poppy Crawford. She was sensitive and receptive under the mask

of devil-may-care which she adopted in order to appear modern and smart.

She was moulded of finer clay than Poppy. Hammond had noticed that, for instance, she had disliked Poppy's loud laughter in the street. She had breeding, and even while she tried to forget the ethics of her upbringing they were obviously too deep-rooted to be altogether ignored.

"Complexes are always entertaining," Hammond soliloquised, as he walked with Eve to the garage where Bobby had left his car. "I wonder what this child will be like in ten years' time. Either she'll marry early and settle down to domestic bliss, or she'll throw in her hand and do something foolish; or perhaps she'll sow her wild oats after marriage. One wonders what will happen."

2

Eve hung on to Hammond's arm and grouched at the weather.

"My silver shoes will be splashed with mud," she said, laughing.

She was not indulging in any psychological studies like the man at her side. She was just enjoying life. She thought it "rather a thrill" to be out so late with this merry party. She pictured her mother and father, fast asleep in the quiet house down in Sussex, and grimaced. They did not approve of her conduct. They had tried to dissuade her from coming up to town this morning with Poppy. Eve's mother, in particular, disapproved of Poppy Crawford, and regretted that Eve had ever started the friendship. And both the Poor Parents, as Eve called them, considered it unwise and "bad form" for her to career round town at night with Poppy, a boy like Bobby whom they had met once, whose type they deplored, and a man whom they did not know at all. They had all argued about it during breakfast this morning. The argument had ended like most of them did nowadays. Mr. Walton-Evans threatened to stop Eve's allowance, and Mrs. Walton-Evans dissolved into tears. But Eve did as she wanted to,

These were not Victorian days, Eve informed them both. A girl could go about town without a chaperone, and nobody except out-of-date people like the Poor Parents would dream of criticising. For a whole year Eve had tried to settle down to the type of existence her mother led, and to interest herself in the local inhabitants. But she had failed dismally. She had found herself growing restive, bad-tempered, moody. And then Poppy Crawford had come on the scene just in time to give Eve the push which she needed. Coached by Poppy, she plunged eagerly into the cult of extreme modernism.

In her heart of hearts, Eve did not admire Poppy, could not respect her. But Poppy was an amusing friend, knew her way about the world, and was quite willing to teach Eve a few things. Poppy had a very good time. Her mother had died years ago. Her father—a stockbroker, living in Haywards Heath—was a weak-minded, foolish man, completely under the thumb of his pretty and inconsequent daughter. She had a two-seater car of her own. She went out when she wanted and where she wanted. Haywards Heath saw little of Miss Crawford. Her present craze was to get on the films. Failing success in this, she wished to ensnare an American millionaire.

Poppy had had heaps of love-affairs. At least, she called them love-affairs. But they were rapid, flashing episodes without deep sentiment or sincerity, and she maintained that she could never remain in love with any man for longer than a fortnight.

Eve had had no love-affairs. But she was fundamentally a sentimentalist, and her ideas about love and marriage were touched with idealism. She tried to be cynical. But in her heart she was utterly without cynicism. At nineteen she was still in a stage of adolescence which was very disturbing to her. She was not sure of herself. She was afraid that she was rather fickle in her affections. She hoped that some man would come along ultimately to inspire a deathless and noble passion in her. She had no desire to become what Poppy was by nature—promiscuous.

Suffering rather from the vagaries of this adolescent period, Eve alternated between despising sentiment and embracing it as a creed. Like so many girls of her age with a warm, full temperament, she was inclined to look

upon every man she met as a possible lover. In most cases this possibility faded out instantly, before she had known the man ten minutes. But now and then a sentimental doubt lingered. There was the case of a certain young medical practitioner who resided close to her home, and had attended her for influenza last spring. He had obviously found her attractive, and she had been momentarily thrilled by his frank admiration of her. He was not very good-looking, rather fat and slow, and mediocre in his profession. But for several days Eve had allowed herself to indulge in dreams of herself as the wife of a country doctor, living a noble life, visiting the sick, helping her husband in his career. Then had come reaction; a horror of being drawn into marriage with so dull a man as a struggling country doctor; leading a life without thrills, having little money to spend and meeting no one save boring, country people.

To-night marked a new epoch in her career. She had enjoyed herself, not only because she always found a theatre, town, and a night-club exciting, but because Lawrence Hammond had been one of the party. For Bobby Richards she had very little use, except as a useful friend. But Hammond struck her seriously as being one of the most attractive men she had ever met.

Of his defects she knew nothing. But she found his brown, saturnine face and rather cool, tolerant manner most intriguing. Here was a man not easy to conquer, and in this girl the "eternal Eve" was strongly developed—woman seeking the thrill of conquest. And the greatest thrill of all, naturally, is conquest when the running is difficult. That fact applies to either sex.

She had set herself out to be charming to Mr. Hammond, but now, at two in the morning, when the evening was over, she was uncertain of the impression she had made. He had been very nice; very attentive; but in no way had he responded to her attempts at flirtation. Eve brooded over this as she entered the garage with him and watched him hand over a ticket to the yawning proprietor, and pay the amount due.

His sleek head, his graceful, well-proportioned body held her attention. She watched him start up the engine of the big, luxurious Packard which Bobby's idolising mother

had recently given him. Then he got into the vehicle and held open the door for her.

"Come along, Eve."

She sat down beside him, drawing her black velvet coat about her closely. She felt suddenly cold and tired. The early morning wind cut through the thin sheath of the dark red georgette dress she was wearing. She shivered.

Hammond touched the accelerator with his foot. The perfect engine purred and hummed. They moved slowly out of the garage into the dark, wet street.

"Topping bus, this straight-eight Packard," said Hammond.

"Wonderful," said Eve.

"Young Richards is a lucky young devil, getting it," added Hammond.

"Have you got a car?" she asked curiously.

"No," he said. "I can't afford to run one."

"He must be rather hard-up," Eve reflected. "What a pity."

The man of her dreams had unlimited means; could afford to shower her with expensive gifts and place her in a most luxurious home. She was slightly disappointed to find that this attractive man with his satyr-like face and cold, critical eyes should be poor. But somehow it did not lessen his attraction.

She thought:

"I wonder, when Bobby drives us home, if Lawrence will come with us and sit at the back with me . . . and if he does . . . if he'll kiss me."

Her heart gave a sudden leap at the thought. It would be thrilling to see those curiously cold grey eyes of Hammond's flame into feeling . . . to feel those hard, cynical lips with the short, close-clipped moustache . . . against her mouth.

Her sensation of fatigue and cold vanished. She became suddenly alert, excited, half-afraid.

Hammond said:

"Enjoyed your evening, Eve?"

"Enormously," she said with enthusiasm. "It was simply wonderful."

"Life's pretty dull for you at home, I suppose."

"Ghastly," she said. "Nothing to do. My father is

crazy about roses and shooting—a funny combination——” She laughed. “But he spends all the summer in the garden and all the winter at his shoot, chasing partridges and pheasants. I’m afraid I don’t care for gardening and I can’t shoot. My mother leads the regular county existence, and that bores me.”

“What interests you then?” asked Hammond, as he swung the great Packard adroitly out of the narrow mews into Regent Street.

“Life,” she said childishly.

“H’m,” said Hammond. “That one word embraces the dickens of a lot, my dear. But what is your particular hobby?”

“Music,” said Eve. “I adore music.”

“You play?”

“I improvise. I warble a bit to amuse myself, but I don’t inflict it on others. The Poor Parents hoped I would take up music seriously, but I didn’t want to. There isn’t anything in it nowadays, and people in drawing-rooms howl with fury when they’re asked to listen to a ‘little piece.’ So I just strum.”

“You’re wise,” said Hammond. “I can listen to strumming, but when it comes to the set, classic ‘piece,’ as you say, it’s ghastly—unless the performer is a genius, and there aren’t many geniuses about. Well, here we are——”

He drew the big car up at the curb on which Poppy and Bobby were performing a Charleston, under the forbidding eye of the solitary constable who still surveyed them from the other side of the road. Poppy was in very high spirits. Her Chinese-blue cloak was open, showing a glittering white sequin dress, well above the knees. Her straight black hair was disordered.

Hammond got out of the car.

“Take the wheel, Bobby, and drive your fair ladies home. I’m for home.”

“Oh, I say!” exclaimed Bobby. “I promised to drive the girls back to Haywards Heath, but I did think you’d come too. It’ll be frightfully dull driving back alone—over an hour of it.”

Eve, who had stepped out of the car and was standing on the pavement beside Poppy, looked at Hammond.

Her heart began to beat very quickly. She said: "Yes, do come down, Lawrence."

They had all called each other by their Christian names before half the evening was over.

He glanced at her. The street-lamp above her lit up her charming face and revealed the invitation in her eyes. She wanted him to drive down to Haywards Heath. He was not at all disposed to the long drive at this early hour. It meant they would not be down there till four o'clock . . . and back in town at six. All very well for the young and enthusiastic. But Lawrence Hammond, after years of the East and a lifetime of being an egoist, yearned for his comfortable bed. Besides, that look in the eyes of the Walton-Evans child disturbed him. If he went down with her . . . they would sit in the back of the car . . . it would mean a little love-making. He really had no desire to be food for Eve's experience. The last thing on earth he craved was for this young, impulsive girl to fall in love with him.

However, despite all his cold reasoning and love of analysis, Lawrence Hammond was man enough to be flattered by the undisguised invitation in Eve's hazel-green eyes. The impudence of her, he thought, aged nineteen—wanting him to drive down to the country with her at two in the morning, just to satisfy her sentimental craving. But she was adorably pretty; the slim, rounded figure was exquisite; and that wide, provocative mouth—damn it! If she wanted a lesson, let her have it.

"I'll come if you like," he said briefly.

"I'll sit beside Bobby," said Poppy, with a secret, laughing look at Eve, whom she knew was terrified lest she should be placed anywhere in the car except beside Hammond. "He's a devil with the accelerator. I'll have to keep down the pace."

"Yes, look here, if I'm coming, you're not to do more than fifty on the open road," said Hammond.

"Fifty!" Bobby's limpid eyes behind the horn-rimmed glasses expressed pained surprise. "That's only crawling for the Packard. She'll do eighty without feeling it."

"But we'd feel it if we crashed," said Hammond. "Get ahead, Bobby, and don't be an ass."

Eve sat in the luxurious *tonneau* of the car beside Hammond. She was snug and warm under a fur-lined rug, and she was happy. Hammond was holding her hand. He held it under the rug. She felt his fingers, very hard and lean, over her soft ones. She was extraordinarily thrilled, and glad that he had consented to accompany her.

Hammond held her hand because he knew it was expected of him, and her obvious happiness amused him.

Bobby drove swiftly along the wet, deserted streets, through the meaner thoroughfares of the suburbs, and out of town on to the London-Brighton road. They met practically no traffic. But the road was greasy, and Hammond at intervals cautioned the boy to keep down the pace.

Eve gazed dreamily ahead at the long shaft of white light that blazed from the Packard's head-lamps. On either side the trees looked like dark, gaunt ghosts ; stripped of their leaves by the autumn winds. Everything seemed strange and dark and ghostly at this early-morning hour.

Bobby and Poppy, in the front seats, talked and laughed tirelessly. But Hammond said little, and Eve did not talk because she was so happy holding Hammond's hand under the rug, and she feared if she spoke or moved that he would take it away.

"I believe I'm falling in love," she told herself, half-fearfully. "I wonder what *he* is feeling."

To the right of them lay the quiet, black woods. Above, the sky loomed starless and heavy with cloud. It would rain again before dawn.

Eve stole a glance at Hammond's profile. He was looking ahead of him. She felt a sudden contraction of the heart. The drive would be over in another twenty minutes. And he had done nothing but hold her hand. She felt rather ashamed of herself for wanting him to kiss her . . . but she did. She was so afraid that when he said good-bye to her to-night she would never see him again. He had intrigued her more than any man she had ever met before.

She clung to the childish belief that if a man makes love to a girl he will forget her less easily. She had yet to

learn that in numbers of cases it is the reverse. A man more often remembers the woman he has not kissed.

She deliberately snuggled a little closer to Hammond and sighed.

Lawrence Hammond turned to her. In the dusk of the car he saw her wide, shining eyes gazing up at him, her half-opening, tempting mouth.

"Well?" he said, with a half-smile. "That was a big sigh. Tired, my dear?"

"Fairly," she said.

"And what will you do to-morrow—or, rather, this afternoon?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said impatiently. She wished he would not talk of abstract things; that he would feel as she felt . . . the glamour of this long drive in the early morning . . . they two alone in the back of the car. Was Poppy right? Was he just a cold, superior creature without natural emotions?

She began to shiver from sheer nerves, and he felt her trembling. He bit his lip. He knew perfectly well that she wanted him to make love to her. And he knew himself—and the inadvisability of playing with sex-emotions.

"Women are such fools," he thought irritably. "They are never happy unless they're playing with fire. It's all such bosh about the modern girls being like boys—able to take care of themselves; damn it, they're as emotional as the women in Queen Victoria's age, and they can't take care of themselves one whit better when they come up against a man who attracts them."

"What are you thinking about?" asked Eve.

"Women," said Hammond.

"What do you think about women?"

"A good deal that's nice and a good deal that isn't."

"Oh!" said Eve, half-shocked.

She suddenly drew away her hand and sat up straight, looking out of the window, her cheeks hot and red, her eyes resentful. Poppy was right. Lawrence Hammond was too "damned superior." What did he mean by a "good deal that wasn't nice"? How beastly of him!

Hammond knew exactly what was going on in her mind. He had not travelled twice round the globe without indulging in various affairs with women, and he understood

the feminine make-up just as well as any man can understand it. This child was annoyed because he appeared critical and impervious to her charms. He looked at her stiffened figure, at the head so proudly turned to the window, and smiled. And suddenly, because she had drawn away from him, exhibited that little spurt of pride, a hot gust of selfish passion shook Hammond. He could see that it would be interesting to make her respond to him.

He flung an arm around her, and pulled her back to his side.

"Don't sit up there like that, so straight and proud, you funny baby," he said.

Her body quivered. The unexpected embrace tore down the weak little flags of hauteur which she had hoisted. The next moment she was leaning against him, and both his arms were around her. His grey eyes were looking at her, warm with that flame which she had done her best to fan.

"Well?" he murmured. "Happy now?"

Held like that in his arms, Eve tumbled precipitously into love with Lawrence Hammond, and was much too stirred to be annoyed by his half-contemptuous question.

"Yes," she said. "Oh, yes . . . terribly happy."

She wound her arms about his neck. Her wide black velvet sleeves slipped back. He turned his head and put his lips against the warm, blue, shadowy spot just in the curve of one of those slim white arms. He felt a shudder run through her. The responsiveness of her fired him. He lost his head, and turned to her lips . . . closed them in a long, fierce kiss which seemed to her to last an incredible time.

Ecstasy—the joy of purely physical feeling—shivered through Eve. She shut her eyes. She lay against him, silent, acquiescent, curiosity and hunger momentarily appeased by the passion of the man's lips. It was the first time any man had kissed her—like that.

She felt his hand under her cloak—felt it slip down her back; felt his heart pumping against hers. And then she was afraid. All the teaching and morale of a lifetime rose up to cool her longing for surrender. A reluctance as natural and primitive as the original desire asserted itself, and she knew that although she believed herself to be

wildly in love with Lawrence Hammond she could not make herself altogether cheap in his eyes.

She opened her eyes and looked up at him, breathless, gasping. She pushed his head back from hers.

"Don't—please."

"Ssh, don't spoil it," he whispered, and caught her back in his arms. "God, child, you know how to kiss."

"I've never kissed—anyone before."

"Then you've got the natural ability——" He was uncontrolled now; his lips hard and rough against her soft young face. "Kiss me again——"

"No," she said. "Please——" and suddenly tears rushed to her eyes. "Oh, Lawrence, I do love you, but let me go."

He scarcely heard the words, but he felt her cheeks, her lashes, wet under his lips. With almost a shock, he realised that she was crying. He drew back at once and let his arms fall to his sides. Desire died down in him. He felt ashamed of himself. Base and mean to take advantage of the passion of this child. Only nineteen—a mere baby, he thought angrily. He put a hand up to his face and felt it wet from her tears. She was frightened. Well, perhaps she had had her lesson now.

She still lay against him, huddled, crying, her face hidden on his shoulder. She was trembling with sobs. He said under his breath:

"Don't cry, old thing, for heaven's sake. There's nothing to cry about. Eve—be quiet—the others will hear you."

She put her clenched hand up to her mouth and tried to control herself. She realised vaguely that Hammond was cross with her, and that in some way or other this first *grande passion* of her life had failed dismally to materialise into anything noble or splendid. The man's rough hands and lips had frightened her. At the same time they had roused something in her which was much more terrifying . . . something more physical than mental; something dominant, and at the same time demanding. She heard Hammond's low voice, curtly telling her to be quiet.

"Ssh, Poppy and Bobby will hear you. Do pull yourself together, for God's sake."

She made a big effort, and stopped crying. But she

could not speak. She could only lie there with her eyes pressed against his shoulder. She wished wretchedly that he would put his arm around her, comfort her. But he sat quite still with his arms at his sides. She felt, mentally, that he had flung her right on to a desert island, and that she was totally cut off from him.

"I knew this would happen," he reflected. "It was damn silly of me to come. Now for a scene, I suppose."

He glanced uneasily at the pretty brown head on his shoulder. He coughed and moved.

"I say, do you mind if I get a cigarette out of my coat-pocket, Eve?" he said.

She moved away from him at once. She sat back in her corner of the car, fumbled for a handkerchief, and buried her hot, wet face in it. She heard Hammond strike a match, and the pleasant aroma of a Turkish cigarette reached her nostrils. He said:

"Have a cigarette, will you?"

But she only shook her head and sat silent, shoulders drooping. She was bowed down with misery. She hardly knew why she was so miserable, except that she thought that she had made herself cheap in Lawrence Hammond's eyes. She had literally flung herself into his arms and told him she loved him, and he did not love her at all. He could not; otherwise he would not be sitting there apart from her so coolly smoking; talking to her in that hard, matter-of-fact voice.

Hammond smoked in silence. Once or twice he stifled a yawn. He was bored with the whole business now. Peering out, he saw that they were nearing Haywards Heath, and felt devoutly thankful. He wondered why he had ever consented to come.

4

Eve, also aware that they must be reaching their destination, at last raised her head and looked at Hammond. She could see his profile faintly—dark, irregular, with the thin, rather bitter lips, narrow jaw, projecting brows. The face of a satyr—ugly, yet extraordinarily attractive. She could not see him plainly in the dusk of the car, but all the evening she had taken stock of him; knew so many little intimate details about him; the way his hair grew, low

on the forehead, dark and smooth, brushed straight back ; the curious contrast of the light-grey eyes, narrowly set in the thin brown face. Ugly and fascinating. Eve's heart was sick within her as she sat there, miserably staring at him. She hated him because he did not speak to her ; would not put her at her ease. Yet, when she had told him that she loved him, she had meant it. She did love him. It was a kind of physical thrall ; she recognised that fact, young though she was. There was nothing spiritual about this intense feeling which had been born in a single night. But she wanted, badly, to feel his arms around her again ; she wished that he would turn to her, smile at her, reassure her.

In despair she saw that Bobby Richards had turned the car into the road that led out of Haywards Heath towards her home. She could not tolerate the idea that she must leave Lawrence Hammond with a formal good-bye ; that she would never know what he thought of her ; what that passionate embrace had meant to him.

She crushed her wet little handkerchief into a ball and leaned toward him.

" Lawrence," she said forlornly.

He turned to her, taking the cigarette from his lips.

" Yes? "

" Lawrence——" She gulped. " Don't—*don't* be—like this! "

" Now for it," he thought grimly. " Lord, what a state the child's in. She's wallowing in sentiment." He said aloud : " Don't be a silly kid, Eve. Where's your sense of humour? You mustn't take life so seriously."

Hot-cheeked, wide-eyed, she stared at him, her heart beating with slow, heavy thumps.

" I suppose it didn't mean anything to you then, when you—kissed me," she said.

" It was very delightful. You're a very charming child, but for heaven's sake laugh about it. It was just a pleasant ending to a very pleasant night, my dear."

Crushed, defeated, she said no more. But she suffered as only extreme youth can suffer . . . agonies of shame and misery. Lawrence Hammond did not take her or their kisses seriously. But she had taken him with deadly

seriousness. She would have given anything in the world for him to put his arm around her again and be a little less hard and flippant. She could not readjust her emotions like he did—at will. Her sense of humour was lost in the wilderness of this emotional crisis.

"Poppy would have laughed—roared with laughter. She doesn't take life seriously," she thought unhappily. "Oh, I wish I didn't—but I *feel* things so!"

Where now was the smart, ultra-modern Miss Walton-Evans, who was mistress of herself and her actions, and knew how to deal with foolish, admiring men?

Poor Eve bowed her head abjectly under the lash of her own reflections. And Hammond, who knew exactly what she was feeling, deliberately ignored her attitude. He was really rather sorry for her. But he did not intend to show what he felt. She had been asking for this the whole evening, he argued with himself. Next time, perhaps, she would realise that it is not at all safe to rouse a man's passions.

The car rolled up the drive to the Walton-Evans' house. A kind of panic seized Eve. She clutched at Hammond's arm.

"Are you angry with me? Oh, tell me, please," she said wretchedly.

"Of course I'm not," he said. "Buck up, my child. Pull yourself together and don't be so intense. There's been no harm done, you know."

"When shall I see you again?" she asked.

"Much better not see me any more, my dear," he said. "You've learned for yourself—I'm not safe. I swear it. And I don't fool round with young girls. It isn't my gambit at all. Besides, I shall be going back to the Malay States very shortly."

Eve looked at him dumbly. She felt acutely miserable. Not to see him again—oh, the idea was intolerable. He had frightened and humiliated her, but he had given her ecstasy—such ecstasy as she had not dreamed of. She could not bear the thought that he refused to see her again.

All her pride and common sense collapsed. She was caught in a torrent of emotion again. She said:

"Oh, Lawrence, please—don't run away from me. I'll be sensible. I swear it."

"This is the sort of thing I always do run away from, my child, I assure you," he said. "I've enjoyed our evening, but—— Now we're here—this is your place, isn't it? Looks a jolly old house. Good night, Eve."

She had no option but to say good night, and shake hands with him formally. The car had stopped, and Bobby opened the door for her to get out. She was cold and shivering under her black velvet wrap. She felt thankful that neither Bobby nor Poppy could see her shiny nose and reddened eyelids in the dim, starless, early morning. Poppy blew her a kiss.

"See you sometime, old thing. Ring me up. It's been a gorgeous night. Bye-bye!"

"Good-bye, Eve," said Bobby, sweeping off his hat and making her a mock bow. "It's been marvellous."

"Good-bye," she said in a controlled voice, although she had to bite her lower lip hard to keep herself from crying. "Thanks awfully, all of you."

The Packard moved down the drive. The strong headlights lit up the trees and the well-clipped lawn in passing. Then the lights vanished. The purr and hum of the engine died away. Poppy screamed a final "So long, old bean," from the gate which led into the road.

Eve stood still, staring round her. The garden of her home looked strangely eerie and unfamiliar at this early morning hour. The wind was rising, and the stark boughs of the poplars and the silver birches which fringed the lawn waved like gaunt and ghostly arms. Eve felt the sudden chill of rain against her upturned face. She turned to the front door.

If only Lawrence Hammond would come back! She felt she would have died of joy if he had jumped out of that car and come back to her this moment, and taken her in his arms.

Was she truly, sincerely in love with him? She did not know. She only knew that he was what she wanted—a stronger personality than her own. In the depths of despair that seized her now that he was gone, she almost wished she had not checked the tide of his passion, that she had given herself to him utterly. She might have kept him then.

But such violent feelings as these could not possibly

endure. Eve was a person of moods. She passed quickly from desperate, unbridled emotion to a sensation of shame and self-loathing.

How cheap she had made herself in Hammond's eyes ! Why had she let herself be caught in a thrall like that ? Why had she allowed Lawrence Hammond to humiliate her ?

She shook with weeping. She fumbled blindly in her silver-beaded bag for the latch-key, and found it. She let herself into the quiet house and switched on the electric light. The atmosphere was warm and comforting after the chill, damp air outside. Somehow Eve's crushed, fallen spirits rose slightly as she looked at the familiar objects around her. It was all simple and homely, and conveyed to Eve a feeling of home. She maintained that her home-life bored her. She was rather contemptuous of the Poor Parents. But, after all, this place and these people were the sure and stable things of life, on which she could always depend.

Men like Lawrence Hammond . . . passions . . . humiliations—all the thrills and adventures of life—were outside, passing ; but here was home ; here were the objects familiar to her from babyhood ; upstairs were the mother and father who had brought her into the world, and who—although they had little in common with her—gave her of their best, and did for her what they thought best.

She passed from passionate emotion into remorse because she was an ungrateful daughter.

Reaching her bedroom door, she switched off the lower hall light which was controlled on the upper landing, and passed into her room.

Here, where rose-shaded lights cast a warm, pleasant glow over a moss-green carpet and white virginal suite, Eve was once again seized with a feeling of appreciation of her home.

Ethel, the parlourmaid, had laid her white silk nightgown and blue quilted dressing-gown over the bed, which was neatly turned down. The hump in the centre showed that the hot-water bottle, which Eve liked summer or winter, had not been forgotten. Oh, how tired she was ! What a thrilling, exhausting evening it had been. . . .

She walked to her white dressing-table. It was semi-circular with a knee-hole in the centre. On it lay various

bottles and bowls and an ivory toilet-set bearing her initials in silver. She let her velvet coat fall from her and stared at herself in the mirror.

"I look frightful," she thought. Her hair was ruffled, her cheeks tear-stained, her nose badly in need of powder.

Somewhere in the house a clock chimed the half-hour. Eve looked at her wrist-watch. Half-past four. How late it was! She was exhausted and her head ached badly. She searched in the top drawer of her dressing-table for aspirin. Then she took off the georgette evening gown and stood for a moment, thinking; slim, straight, youthful, in cami-knickers of thick pink *crêpe-de-chine* which she had made herself.

Suddenly all her feeling of satisfaction in her home, of affection for her parents, of remorse for her stupidity, vanished. There returned the frightful sensation that she was in love with Lawrence Hammond and wanted him . . . and he had gone away. He thought it wiser not to see her again.

She closed her eyes, and visualised, as only an infatuated woman can do, the whole of that passionate scene in the back of the car. She felt his arms pressing her against him, his hard lips on her mouth.

"Oh, Lawrence . . . Lawrence," she whispered.

She stumbled to her bed and fell across it, and began to cry again.

And it was in that moment that Eve made up her mind that she *must* and would see Lawrence Hammond again.

CHAPTER II

I

GILES WALTON-EVANS pushed his chair back from the table and wiped a bristly moustache with his napkin.

"Why isn't Eve down to breakfast?" he asked.

Mrs. Walton-Evans also pushed back her chair, but whereas her husband flung his crumpled napkin on the table she folded hers neatly and put it through a ring.

The act was a silent reproach. Her life was one long series of these acts which, to her grief, made no impression on her family.

"Eve was still asleep when I called out to her as I came down, Giles," she said.

"Home with the milk, eh?"

Mr. Walton-Evans' face—burnt brick-red by constant exposure to the sun—was good-humoured. Then his thick greyish brows met in a frown.

"By the way, what time did the little gad-about get home?"

"I don't know," said Eve's mother, a trifle acidly.

"Who was she in town with?"

"Oh, that horrible girl, Poppy Crawford, and young Bobby Richards and some other man whose name I do not know."

"Bobby Richards is a wasp-waisted little nincompoop," said Mr. Walton-Evans. "The modern youth! Can dance all right, but couldn't shoulder a gun if he tried. Deplorable. And the Crawford girl—mouth like a pillar-box, and the brains of a rabbit. Can't think why Eve picks on such friends."

"Eve's mouth is as much a pillar-box red as Poppy Crawford's these days," said Mrs. Walton-Evans. "It's frightful. My daughter—painting her face. I've spoken—begged her not to do it. She says it's the fashion; that she'd look dowdy if she didn't use a lip-stick. It's only because it becomes her to look pale that she doesn't rouge."

"Oh, well, thank God, Eve's a nice child under the

surface-paint," said Mr. Walton-Evans, pounding a broad chest to get rid of his indigestion. "But the Crawford girl—my dear, I met old Tom Crawford the other day in the train going up to town, and he as good as admitted his own child had all the making of a first-class harlot."

"Giles!" exclaimed Mrs. Walton-Evans. "Really!"

"Sorry if the truth offends you, my love," he said. "But it's true. And if I thought the same about my daughter I'd tell her to clear out. Eve's only a child, and I'm sure she behaves herself decently, even if she does go round with that rotten crowd."

"How do we know what she does?" said Mrs. Walton-Evans. "You're out all day, my dear Giles, and you don't know Eve as I know her . . . thoroughly discontented and restless . . . hating the life I lead . . . avoiding my friends."

"Well, well," said Mr. Walton-Evans. "Youth will be youth, and as long as she conducts herself decently, as I say, let her spread her wings a bit. Do her good. She isn't at all your nature, my dear Beatrice, so why try and make her like you are? She's a different generation."

"She isn't like my side of the family at all," said Mrs. Walton-Evans, a trifle bitterly. "Every day I see her growing more and more like your sister, Violet."

"Vi was all right," said Mr. Walton-Evans. "Bit flighty in her youth, but she settled down."

"Flighty!" echoed Mrs. Walton-Evans. "Why she had a name in town for being a flirt, and she broke your mother's heart by marrying that low-born Canadian."

"Come, come, Beatrice," said Mr. Walton-Evans. "Vi doesn't do you any harm, so let her alone."

Beatrice Walton-Evans shrugged her shoulders.

Her husband having turned his attention to *The Times*, she rose and walked to the sideboard to re-arrange a vase of sweet-peas which attracted her attention. She was a thin, slight woman with slightly-stooping shoulders and hair which had once been blonde, but was now ashen-grey, looped back from her head and pinned up in an old-fashioned chignon. In her youth she had been pretty, but ill-health had robbed her of all good looks. Her extreme slenderness made her look young for fifty-five. Her thin, bloodless lips, turned down at each corner, and

her large, pale-blue eyes, which looked as though they had been washed out by continual weeping, expressed disappointment in life and a most unhappily jealous temperament.

She was jealous of everything and everybody, and most particularly of her own daughter, Eve.

Even thirty years ago, when Giles Walton-Evans had been in love with the fragile, pink and white prettiness of the young Beatrice, she had been jealous of his sister, Violet . . . Vi, who, in spite of her reputation as a heartless flirt—shocking in those Victorian days—had always been the favourite of her family, and was in particular a favourite of her brother, Giles.

This jealousy amounted to an incurable disease with Beatrice, and, as she grew older, it increased. Ten years ago a serious internal operation robbed her not only of her blonde beauty, but of her vivacity. She became delicate, ailing, plaintive. She performed her domestic duties wearily. Her social activities fatigued her. But good form and convention were as the breath of life to her and she did what was expected of her as the mistress of Giles' house. She paid her calls; she held her little bridge-teas; she organised tennis or croquet-parties for Eve during the summer, shooting-parties for her husband in the winter. And, during all these functions, her large, faded eyes and sad, drooping lips were dumb reproaches to those about her.

"Poor little Bee Walton-Evans isn't really strong enough to do all she does," was the opinion of her friends. "But she's so unselfish and gentle and sweet."

Unselfish, gentle and sweet. The components of the mask which she wore for the world; but under it all, under the genuine delicacy, the real Beatrice Walton-Evans was a small, raging furnace of bitterness. She kept herself admirably under control. But the moral defects were there, and the jealous anger that she displayed only under the greatest provocation was never absent. Somehow those who knew her intimately were always vaguely and uneasily aware of its existence.

She carried the feeling to an extreme, until it bordered on the ridiculous. Her husband, recognising that she simply could not help it, endeavoured in a clumsy way not to give rise to it. She had certainly never had cause to be

jealous of women in his life. He was a monogamist. He had wanted only the one woman and he kept to her. But nowadays she was as jealous of her pretty, vivacious daughter as she could have been of any sex-rival. She could not admit a rival in her husband's affections even in his pets—she hated him to become too fond of a dog.

Although she was not on the best of terms with her young daughter, she was not disposed to share Eve's affections with anybody else. She had been annoyed by Eve's penchant for a governess at school. She was angry because the Eve of to-day would not attend her bridge-parties, or accompany her to the houses of her friends who lived around Haywards Heath. It humiliated and troubled her that Eve should find pleasure only outside her own home. She never appeared to realise that Eve escaped from the house because of the atmosphere, grievances, and jealousies which she, the mother, created.

Twelve years ago the atmosphere of the home had been decidedly healthier and happier. But that was when Eve's only brother, Eric, had been alive. The one person in the world whom Beatrice Walton-Evans had really loved to the annihilation of self was her son. Of course she had been jealous of him—fiercely so. But, fortunately for her, Eric had always understood her, and loved his mother best of all his family. He was like her in his youth—rather delicate, sober-minded. She had triumphantly boasted to relations and friends that Eric was *her* side of the family—not one of the ruddy, loud-voiced Walton-Evans!

Eve, the girl, had been born later in life. In 1915, when Eric was at Cambridge, Eve was still only a little thing of seven, playing happily in her nursery. She had realised nothing of the frightful world-war which had devastated Europe; only now vaguely remembered one morning when her brother, Eric, came into the nursery in khaki uniform to bid her good-bye. And she had asked her nurse why "mummy was crying," and why father looked so grave.

The next and only other recollection of Eric was connected with his death . . . of a grim little orange envelope being handed to her mother . . . of terrible, unrestrained grief—heart-broken sobs which seemed to fill the house all that day and all that night.

Eric's death in the war had been the one real grief of

Mrs. Walton-Evans' life ; the one sorrow for which she deserved sympathy. But out of it was developed the multitude of little griefs and complaints which were to mar her own chances of happiness and interfere with the contentment of those who lived with her.

She had never loved Eve as she had loved her idolised boy. His death, of course, enhanced his value in her eyes. She was certain that, had he lived, he would have been a finer character than Eve—more of a comfort to his parents.

Mr. Walton-Evans, whilst feeling the loss of his only son keenly, was, nevertheless, very fond of his little girl. Even as a baby she had developed a sense of humour, and she amused him. But the older Eve grew, the more healthy and beautiful and attractive, the more her mother—with deep-rooted prejudice—mourned her son ; and, although she would never have admitted it, in her heart of hearts she wished that Eve had died and that Eric had lived.

In the twelve years which followed Eric's death in the war, Mrs. Walton-Evans did much to crush her daughter's natural affection for her, although, inconsistently, she endeavoured to absorb the girl in her jealous way. During those years the name of Eric was reiterated by the mother until Eve became heartily sick of the mere memory of her brother. She honoured him because, now that she was older, she appreciated the sacrifice he had made for his country. But she would have missed him far more keenly had she been allowed to think of him in a normal fashion. Mrs. Walton-Evans, however, in a most abnormal and foolish fashion, kept the torch of remembrance burning until it bred both boredom and resentment in the girl's heart.

A huge painting of Eric in uniform hung over the mantelpiece in the dining-room. Before this Mrs. Walton-Evans kept flowers, as before a shrine. His sword and cap were hung in the hall. The telegram announcing his death, framed appropriately, hung beside them. These were natural and pathetic mementoes. But continually—almost daily—the name of Eric was brought before Eve's mind.

What Eric would have done and said and thought ; how Eric would have acted under certain conditions ; what position Eric would have attained had he lived to be a man.

Unending, wearying, doleful, and absolutely futile panegyric of Eric. Generally Eve was too even-tempered to be goaded by these grievous allusions to her lost brother. But she had her moments of irritability and impatience when the mention of Eric's name made her grind her teeth.

When she had been quite a small child of eight—just a year after Eric had been killed—there had been one terrible, unforgettable scene between mother and daughter, which, although now a shadow of the past, had never really been forgotten by either the woman or the girl.

Eve, in a moment of naughtiness, had stolen a pot of jam from the nursery cupboard, eaten half of it, and was sick. An irate nurse marched her to her mother. Mrs. Walton-Evans lectured Eve for twenty minutes on the wickedness of this heinous offence ; then added :

“ Your darling brother Eric would never, *never* have done such a dreadful thing. No matter *how* much he had wanted the jam when he was a little boy of eight, nothing would have induced him to steal it. You're a bad, greedy little girl. You had better ask God to forgive you and make you more like your darling brother was.”

Eve, sent to bed for the rest of the day, brooded in the darkness of the nursery over these words—brooded as children will, cut off from communication with the rest of the household, and condemned to the long-drawn-out torture of bed and drawn blinds when outside the sun is shining and the birds are singing. She had felt that she hated her mother, hated jam, and most of all hated the scarce-remembered brother who would *never* have stolen jam.

She wept herself to sleep, and awoke early that next morning, still sullenly contemplating the saint-like brother who had no human failings, was—and always had been—a beautiful angel. Then, with a spark of humour gleaming in the darkness of her mind, and that “ I'll-show-you ” feeling, she had got out of bed, seized the half-eaten, offending pot of jam, which nurse had put back in the cupboard, crept down to the dining-room, and, standing on a chair, covered the pictured face of the dead hero in jam.

She returned to bed feeling that she had done something frightful ; half-inclined to weep and kiss the jam-smeared face of the angel-brother.

When Mrs. Walton-Evans, roused from her bed by a horrified maid, saw the desecrated photograph of her darling, she lost her temper completely. In a blind fury she marched into the child's bedroom and thrashed her, spanked her unmercifully with the back of a hair-brush until Eve's terrified screams brought her father into the room. Then it was Mr. Walton-Evans who lost his temper with his wife, ordered her out of the room and forbade her ever to thrash the child again. Mrs. Walton-Evans, to do her justice, never wanted to hit Eve again. Later, when her hysterical rage had cooled, she was sorry for what she had done; ashamed of herself for raising a finger against a child. But it was Mr. Walton-Evans who drew the sobbing, shaken little figure on his knee; soothed her jangled nerves; kissed her back to smiles and reassurance again.

"She was only a baby—she didn't realise what she was doing, Beatrice," he had said to his wife later. "Damn it, you mustn't let yourself go to pieces over poor Eric like this."

Mrs. Walton-Evans endeavoured not to let herself go to pieces in the future, and more or less succeeded. But deep down in her heart she never forgot the indignity of her son's jam-smeared face. And Eve never forgot the indignity of that first and last thrashing.

2

In her early teens, Eve went to a convent near her home for her education. When she was in her seventeenth year, her father benefited financially by the death of his elder brother. The family moved from the small house which they occupied in Haywards Heath to this bigger, more luxurious home outside the town. Eve was sent to a finishing-school in Paris for a year. She returned home for good in the autumn of 1926.

No greater affection existed between mother and daughter now, in the autumn of 1927, than had existed previously. Eve, more mature and with more insight into the vagaries of human psychology, was, perhaps, more lenient in her feelings toward her mother. But it was only natural that the girl should feel the greatest affection for her father. He had nothing in common with her, but he was at least a

healthy-minded person of normal tendencies. Eve seemed to him quite "all right," and he took it for granted that she possessed common sense and fundamental decency—things Mrs. Walton-Evans felt must always be drilled into human beings, and were never naturally there.

Mrs. Walton-Evans was now at the stage when her health was in a decline, and she needed a daughter's love and companionship. She was confident that she had always done her duty to the child. It seemed to her scandalous that Eve should have grown up so lacking in affection or respect for such a mother. It never struck her that a mother may perform her duties for her child faithfully, to the last letter, and still fail her. And she had failed Eve—failed utterly to win her love or her sympathy. It never struck the woman that had she lavished less love and tenderness on the memory of the dead son and given more to the living daughter, she would have reaped the benefit to-day, when she was old and tired and Eve approaching womanhood.

There remained nothing now to look forward to but Eve's marriage. A son-in-law. But Mrs. Walton-Evans regarded even the prospect of "a brilliant match," and the acquisition of a nice son-in-law, with gloom. Eve would go away—perhaps live abroad. She would never see her. Or perhaps she would reside near her husband's mother. She would give *that* woman the love that she, Eve's mother, wanted. Eve's children would love *that* grandmother more than they would love *her*. Fresh fields for jealousy and despair. Fresh grounds for wishing passionately that "darling Eric" had lived, and given her a daughter-in-law and grandchildren to love her as much as he had loved her.

This morning, as Mrs. Walton-Evans re-arranged her sweet-peas, she indulged not so much in a sorrowful survey of her own misfortunes and disappointments as in the horrid fear that her daughter would become like Poppy Crawford—*fast*. A painted hussy. That would be the final straw—the dregs in her cup of bitterness.

She sighed, turned from the sideboard, and regarded the red velvet curtains. She made a mental note of the fact that the curtains were faded at the edges.

"I must ask Eve to drive me into Brighton, and I'll take them to the cleaners," she reflected.

The pale September sunshine threw up the rich and cheerful red in the thick Turkey carpet. It was a pleasant room.

Giles had put in the agreeable oak-panelling and the red-tiled open fireplace, over which hung the painting of the dead soldier son. The monks' table and six Jacobean chairs with red tapestried seats had come from the house of Giles's brother, Harry Walton-Evans, whose death, five years ago, had so materially benefited them all. This was Eve's favourite room. She liked it particularly when the red curtains were drawn, and the lights glowed softly against the warm oak-panelling. It pleased her modern taste. Uncle Harry's antiques were to her liking. The drawing-room, which opened out from the opposite side of the lounge-hall, was a dreadful work of Victorian art—flowered yellow satin brocades; polished walnut cabinets full of hideous but expensive china; dreadful water-colours of "still life," and impossible landscapes framed in heavy gilt.

Mrs. Walton-Evans, however, liked her drawing-room, and refused to modernise it to suit her daughter's fancy. The furniture, drapery, and ornaments in that room had been much admired in her own youth, and she scoffed at present-day taste.

Through the French windows in the dining-room one could catch a glimpse of the garden, rather set and formal, down to the dark-green box-hedge. Beyond lay a small pond, fringed with iris and half-covered with beautiful water-lilies. To the right lay the attractive red oblong of a hard tennis court, just visible through the poplars bordering it; to the left a rose-garden—Mr. Walton-Evans' pride and joy. He spent most of the summer working in the garden, and had taken a first and third recently at Chelsea Flower Show.

Farther still lay open fields, then the dark woods of Bolney. The house itself was half-old, half-modern, of Tudor architecture, a good deal of genuine oak in it, and attractive diamond-paned windows. It was one of the biggest places in the district. Mrs. Walton-Evans should have been proud and pleased as its mistress. But even the recent possession of this home, had not stifled the discontent in Beatrice Walton-Evans' heart. Living in this district was, in itself, a disappointment. When her

husband had come into the money and retired, she had earnestly desired to leave Sussex and settle in London; lead the dignified life of a lady in the sacred precincts of Hyde Park or Kensington Gardens, and enter London Society.

But Giles Walton-Evans loathed London, and despised the life a man was forced to lead therein. He had travelled up to London every day of his life, since he had left college, to deal with stocks and shares in Throgmorton Street. His ambition had been to shake the dust of London off his feet. His brother Harry's fortune secured this release. He had sat very firmly on the plaintive whinings of his lady wife, bought this house in Haywards Heath and rented 1,500 acres of shooting close by. He had always wanted to grow roses and to shoot. He now satisfied both these ambitions to the exclusion of all other hobbies.

He made his wife and daughter moderate allowances without being over-generous to them. But he lavished money on his own beloved outdoor sport. He kept a first-rate keeper. He reared birds. He even wasted money on a handsome aviary, full of rare Chinese pheasants, which he had built on a piece of land which they called "the plantation," at the rear of the kitchen-garden.

The winter was to Giles Walton-Evans the season of delight; of long, cold, bracing days when he walked over his shoot with one or two friends as keen on a day's sport as himself; when he ate hearty lunches in some old barn; brought home a good bag at the close of the day.

To Mrs. Walton-Evans, however, the shooting season meant martyrdom. She dreaded the first day of September. It was the beginning of four months of hard work, entertaining Giles' shooting friends; soothing the hurt feelings of the maids who had to clean up the muddy footsteps in the house; consoling the cook who complained that she spent all her time packing up hampers of food for the shooting parties.

But what was life, after all, but one long martyrdom to Beatrice Walton-Evans? And her only consolation was the feeling that nobody understood her on earth, but that in heaven she would doubtless wear a jewelled crown.

Mr. Walton-Evans rustled his *Times*, and glanced over the rim of it at his wife. Her silence worried him. He

felt she was *thinking* things. It was almost worse than hearing her say them.

"Well, well, Beatrice, what's worrying you now?"

"Oh, nothing," she said.

"Get it off your chest, old girl."

She winced. Giles knew how she hated being called "old girl." It jarred on her. She looked at him. He sprawled in his arm-chair at the head of the table—a fine, big, robust-looking man of fifty-seven, with fair curly hair scarcely touched by the grey finger of time. The very ruddiness of his face, the rude health that oozed from the full red lips under the thick moustache, the good-humoured, twinkling blue eyes offended Mrs. Walton-Evans' sight this morning. She felt altogether too frail and sensitive to bear with this loud, jocular husband—or with the wilful modern daughter upstairs, who was still sleeping off the effects of last night's debauch. "Debauch" was how Beatrice would have described it.

"Are you shooting to-day, Giles?"

"No. Hayling advised me not to shoot again till Saturday. Partridges are scarce this year, and it's no use letting the stock get too low. To-morrow being October 1st, we'll beat up the pheasants. By the way, Beatrice, tell cookie I want lunch for four to-morrow. Young Graham is coming with Coleman."

"Who is Mr. Graham?"

"Coleman's friend, that young doctor who's having a holiday down here. You remember Coleman told us the other day he had this chap coming down for a rest—been working too hard up in the north. They were at Edinburgh together. Graham's apparently a clever chap. He shoots, and I told Coleman to send him along."

Mrs. Walton-Evans' mind immediately leapt to match-making.

"Perhaps Mr. Graham is a nice young man, and will be a good friend for Eve. I'm sure she needs the right influence. I dread to think what might happen to her if she gets into bad hands."

"God save us, Beatrice, what a mind you've got," said Mr. Walton-Evans, throwing his paper on the ground. "You pure women make me sick. All things are impure to you. Why should Eve get into bad hands?"

Her pale face flushed.

"Don't shout at me, please, Giles."

"Well, hang it, my dear, Eve's all right. Anyone would think you have every reason to suspect she behaves like a housemaid and is likely to produce an illegitimate child on our door-steps at any moment."

Mrs. Walton-Evans turned to the door.

"You're disgustingly coarse," she said. "And you don't understand that my fears for Eve are only the outcome of my desire to take care of her. She is young and pretty and impulsive."

"So she may be, but she's got her head screwed on the right way, if I know her. She's not a born harlot like Tom Crawford's daughter."

Mrs. Walton-Evans shuddered. There were times when her husband used words which shocked all her delicate sensibilities. But then, he constantly shocked her.

She reached the dining-room door, then, with her fingers on the handle, looked back at the gold-framed painting of Eric—a fair, very ordinary-looking young man in khaki. He had had his mother's sloping shoulders and slight figure and her prim little mouth. She looked at him long and sadly.

If Eric had lived . . . he would have been a good influence for Eve. Giles was so lacking in imagination, in subtlety. He would never see farther than his nose. He would not wake up to the fact that his daughter was growing exactly like Poppy Crawford until Eve committed some glaring indiscretion which he could not fail to see.

Giles rose to his feet and stood before the dining-room window, legs apart, hands in the pockets of his Norfolk jacket.

"Gad, what a morning," he said. "Good to be alive."

Mrs. Walton-Evans flung him a bitter look, and walked out of the room. He didn't seem to realise how distressed she was about Eve's welfare ; or, if he realised it, he didn't care. Nobody had any regard for her feelings in this house.

She walked up the broad oaken staircase and knocked on the door of her daughter's bedroom.

A sleepy voice said :

"Oh, God, don't wake me up. Who is it? "

"It's mother," said Mrs. Walton-Evans.

A lugubrious sigh from the interior of the room.

"Oh, well, come in, Mummy, if you must."

"That is how my family treat me," thought Mrs. Walton-Evans. She tightened her lips and walked into the room.

3

Eve put a hand over her eyes as her mother drew back the chintz curtains, and flooded the dim bedroom with sunlight. She was heavy with sleep. She wanted nothing better than to be allowed to go on sleeping. Her head ached. The glaring morning light hurt her eyes. She felt exasperated with her mother.

"What do you want, Mummy? I didn't get home till late, and I want to go on sleeping."

"Nonsense, dear," said Mrs. Walton-Evans. "It's past half-past nine, and you ought to have been down to breakfast with us. At your age, it's ridiculous to lie up like this just because you went to a dance. And I want you to drive me into Brighton. Those red curtains in the dining-room must be taken to Pullars for re-dipping."

Eve groaned; turned over in the bed and tore the cobwebby lace of her white silk nightgown, from which one shoulder, like "rose-misted marble," emerged.

"Damn!" she said viciously, and hid her face in the pillow. It was cruel—to wake her at half-past nine and talk about re-dipping curtains.

"What time did you get back last night?"

"Oh—late," muttered Eve.

Mrs. Walton-Evans looked at the brown tousled head of her daughter, then at the torn lace of the nightgown, and the exposed shoulder.

"I don't consider those new nightgowns of yours are decent, Eve," she said. "You might as well wear nothing."

Eve flung herself on to her back again; seized the crumpled top sheet and drew it about her neck. She sat upright, glowering at her mother.

"Oh, Mummy, do leave me alone!" she exclaimed. "If you've only come in to wake me up and nag at me, you can jolly well go downstairs again. I'm not in a mood to stick it. Nightgowns are not meant to be *decent*, are they? I'm not going to wear flannel buttoned up to the throat

like you do. Anyhow, I'm presumably a modest, unmarried maiden, and nobody sees me in bed except you and the maids, so it really wouldn't matter if I wore nothing, would it?"

"And I had you educated at a convent," wailed Mrs. Walton-Evans.

"Convent girls are the worst," said Eve, and flung herself back on her pillow again. She felt that she had no patience with Mummy this morning. The pale reproachful face; slight drooping figure in the dark-blue tailored coat-frock with white lace *jabot*, high at the neck; the miniature of her dead son as a baby boy, which she always wore, hanging from a thin, gold chain, irritated Eve beyond belief.

Her mind, now that she was more awake, reverted to last night . . . the hectic hours in the Pompadour . . . the drive home in Bobby's Packard . . . Lawrence Hammond.

She forgot all about her mother as she began to think of Lawrence, of their passionate embrace, his kisses. The blood rushed to her cheeks. She kept her face hidden on the pillow. Her heart began to beat jerkily. She became acutely miserable. She had behaved very badly with Lawrence Hammond, but she had been terribly thrilled by his arms and his lips. She wanted to see him again. She must see him. He had treated her like a foolish child, and had not fallen in the least in love with her; only lost his head in a moment of sheer physical passion. She could scarcely endure that thought. It made her feel so cheapened, so humiliated. Besides, she told herself that Lawrence Hammond was the only man in the world that she wanted. It was essential that she should see him again; *make* him care for her; she must act with more subtlety and wit; not fall so readily into his arms. She had made a ghastly mistake last night in showing him how much she had wanted him to make love to her. Men never care for women who are easily won.

She began to visualise what might happen if she were given another chance with Hammond. Last night's position would be reversed. It would be *he* who would do everything to make her kiss him; and she who, when she saw that he was crazy to hold her in his arms, would yield graciously. Quite possibly, under those conditions, he would insist that she married him. He would take

her back to Malay States as his wife. It would be glorious to be the wife of a man like Lawrence Hammond ; he was so experienced and amusing and interesting—a man whom no other woman had been able to capture.

She knew, this morning, how desperately she was in love with Lawrence. And she would never rest until he was desperately in love with her.

She hated to remember some of the things he had said last night. He had been angry with himself for kissing her. He had said it " was not his gambit to fool round with young girls." He had said she must not see him again ; that he " was not safe."

Not safe ! Eve, the woman, fastened on those words. Admission of a man's weakness. He meant that, although he was a strong-minded, practical person, he was yet sufficiently weak with a pretty girl to be unsafe.

Eve suddenly unclosed her eyes and looked round her bedroom. Last night when she had been exhausted and miserable she had felt this room to be a haven of rest ; her home to be an anchor. But a few hours' sleep had brought back the deathless optimism of youth and that immense self-confidence which vanishes with experience and the passing of the years, but is youth's privileged possession.

Eve suddenly despised her green and white bedroom ; the atmosphere of her home ; her genial but unimaginative father ; her peevish, unsympathetic mother.

Nothing would induce her to leave things as they were, let this marvellous opportunity for gaining an enthralling happiness slip by. She would not let Lawrence Hammond keep away from her. He must not go back to the East thinking of her as a foolish child without self-control ; a schoolgirl who did not know her own mind. She would prove otherwise to him. She would show him that she was a woman, and that she did know her own mind ; that she loved him. But first and foremost she would force him to admit that he loved her.

She looked at her mother and suddenly felt a kind of contemptuous pity for her. Poor Mummy ! What had she ever known of the " roses and raptures " of life ? Somehow Eve could not imagine Mummy surrendering to the ecstasy of the flesh. Such ecstasy, for instance, as she, Eve, had endured last night in the back of the car,

lying in Lawrence Hammond's arms. She thrilled; tingled to her finger-tips. Hugging her knees with her arms, she said:

"I'll take you into Brighton, if you like, Mummy. And tell Ethel to turn on my bath now, will you? I'll get up."

"Don't forget that to-morrow is October 1st, and your father is shooting. Will you walk round with them?" asked Mrs. Walton-Evans in her plaintive voice.

"No, I think I shall go up to town," said Eve.

"Town? Again? But why?"

"Oh, I want to do some shopping," said Eve.

And in her mind she pictured herself making an appointment with Lawrence Hammond. She wanted to see him to-day. But she dared not rush after him so quickly. It would make her look too cheap in his eyes. She must let twenty-four hours elapse before she communicated with him.

"Well, if you do go up to town you must come back in time for dinner," said her mother. "Your father wants me to entertain Reggie Coleman and his friend from Edinburgh, Dr. Graham."

Eve threw back the bed-clothes, put on a pair of green satin gold-stitched mules, and covered the offending silk nightgown with her wrapper, which was of pale-green and gold brocade, edged with imitation sable. Green was her favourite colour. It brought out all the colour in her eyes. She walked to her dressing-table, picked up a small comb, and began to run it through her thick light-brown hair.

"Eve, did you hear me?" said her mother. "You must be home in time for dinner to-morrow night. These men are coming to dinner."

"Yes, all right, Mummy, I will. Reggie is an awful bore. What's the doctor from Scotland like?"

"I don't know. But Reggie Coleman says he is a very clever young doctor and will go far."

"Oh," said Eve, yawning and putting down her comb. "And is Reggie Coleman coming to dinner, too?"

"No. I don't think so."

"Thank the Lord for that," said Eve devoutly.

Her mother regarded her with disfavour.

"I don't think you need sneer at Reggie Coleman. He is a very good man and very devoted to you, Eve."

"Too devoted, darling," said Eve. "I should like him better if he wasn't so devoted."

"I don't understand you," said Mrs. Walton-Evans, falling back on the words which she always used when her daughter annoyed her. "Real affection is wasted on you. You prefer the society of insincere people like that Crawford girl and that terrible boy, Bobby Richards. They only fawn on you for what they can get out of you."

"That isn't true," said Eve. "Both Poppy and Bobby are better off than I am. But, even if it were true, I should like being with them. At least they are amusing. Reggie is a bore. Why waste one's time on people who are boring?"

"I suppose I bore you," said Mrs. Walton-Evans. "That's why you never spend any time with me."

Eve marched to her washstand and caught up a bath-towel and her sponge. The bathroom, speedily, she thought. Mummy was going to turn the conversation into a personal grievance. She always did.

As she passed her mother she noticed, with a sudden feeling of remorse, how frail and miserable she looked. Poor Mummy! After all, she couldn't help her own unhappy temperament.

"I suppose I must be a great disappointment to her," Eve thought. "And I don't suppose I shall like it if my daughter, if ever I have one, is bored with me, even if it's my own fault. It certainly is Mummy's fault if I don't hang round her. She can't bury the hatchet."

But on an impulse she put an arm around her mother and kissed her.

"Buck up, old dear," she said. "I'll be a pride and joy to you yet. I'll hurry up with my bath and then we'll go to Brighton and be perfect little ladies."

"I don't know what you mean," began Mrs. Walton-Evans plaintively. But Eve had vanished. The key turned in the bathroom door with a sharp click. Then came the sound of running water and Eve, singing "*Ich liebe dich*" with theatrical fervour, in her pretty mezzo-soprano voice.

Mrs. Walton-Evans sighed heavily, and retired down to the kitchen to give the daily orders to cook.

The kiss her daughter had given her had not in any

measure satisfied her. It had savoured too much of flippancy. But as a matter of fact it had been a very kindly caress. Eve tried to be casual and selfish because she found it paid to be so in this very casual and selfish era. But underneath she was warmly affectionate and could not bear to see people suffer. She was emotional, and therefore easily stirred by the emotion of others. She was more stubborn and difficult with her mother than with anybody else because Mrs. Walton-Evans always rubbed her up the wrong way. In the right hands, Eve was the most amiable and pliable person in the world. She was extremely generous—foolishly so. Her main trouble was that, figuratively speaking, she gave out far more than she received. It would have been better for her had she been a little less generous in spirit, been like Poppy Crawford, hard and selfish.

As a child she had had intense "crushes," as they called these affections in school-language, either for a friend or a mistress. They were very violent *amours*, lasting quite a considerable time, and generally petering out as soon as the object of devotion surrendered as much time and attention as Eve wanted. Her nature was one which desired, intensely, the thing which seemed unattainable. Having got it, she no longer desired it. To be kept at arm's length, snubbed, or ignored, fanned the flame of Eve's passion to the fiercest fire. She knew, through her own experiences, that her intensity of feeling diminished almost as soon as it was satisfied.

During these periods of violent feeling, which were all complete little dramas in which Eve wallowed as leading lady, she lost all sense of proportion. She felt she would go to any lengths to prove her devotion. Indeed, she subjugated self utterly, was ready to commit any heroic deed and sacrifice, anything in order to bring a smile of pleasure to her loved one's face. But, rock-bottom, it was nothing but sublimated egotism.

Once, at school, she had become violently fond of a sweet-faced nun, who considered it her duty to ignore the affection of her young pupil—even to squash it. She treated Eve rather more coldly than the other children. This coldness fanned Eve's devotion until it became an obsession. She wept herself sick and blind. She refused to

eat. She saved up all her pocket-money to buy the nun beautiful flowers. She slunk about the cloisters like a shadow, waiting for the nun to pass—hoping for one kind smile. She disobeyed rules during her classes, glorying even in admonishment from her adored one—anything so long as the nun noticed her.

This passion in time wore itself out, and one day Eve woke up to ask herself why she had been so silly. Recently she had gone back to the convent for Old Girls' Day, and had thought the nun dull and stupid; laughed at the memory of the agonies she had endured.

Again, there had been a friend whom she had made at the finishing-school in Paris—a French girl of eighteen, named Gabrielle Rousseau. Gabrielle had been smart, vain but attractive, and already she had had a lover—a marvellous young poet, who sent her notes under the very eye of the good woman who kept the *pension*. Eve thought Gabrielle wonderful, thrilling. Gabrielle knew everything about men and love; Gabrielle read naughty French novels; Gabrielle taught Eve all that she had not known before about sex. Eve returned to Haywards Heath from Paris and Gabrielle, still innocent, but no longer ignorant.

There followed a period of healthy exercise; of sudden interest in her father's shoot; in animals; in tennis; in a jolly public-schoolboy in the district, home from Rugby for the summer holidays. Then, last winter, her natural love of and ability for music dominated her existence. She continued the singing-lessons which she had commenced in Paris. Her teacher was not a first-class teacher, but she was moderately good, and Eve admired her. She made Eve work. For a time Eve devoted herself entirely to her singing.

But nothing held Eve's interest for long. In the spring of this year, the Crawfords came to live in Haywards Heath and then Eve came up against Poppy. From that time onward, Eve indulged in the new cult of ultra-modernism. She absorbed some of Poppy's distorted ideas about sex. All men were fair game. Pretty women could do what they wished with a man. To dress well and to look smart should be the first aim and object of a girl's life. Kisses meant nothing. One should do things, and not regret

doing them. To have a conscience was stupid. To lose one's reputation was *à la mode*. Religion was defunct. Good morals spelt boredom. Money and men were the only things that mattered.

These were the ingredients of the brew which Poppy stirred and offered as food for Eve's devouring. But Eve nibbled daintily rather than devoured. She possessed a keener brain than Poppy, and she found if one ate too heartily of Poppy's brew one got mental indigestion. She was growing older, too. She did not form one of her intense attachments for Poppy. But she was amused with her and found it "fun" to go round with her, added to which she had a sneaking admiration for Poppy's lack of morals.

She was reaching a stage when she was conscious of her own good points; her ability to make something really fine out of life if she chose. At the same time, she knew her vulnerable spots . . . her love of excitement . . . her thirst for sex adventure, and that eternal Eve in her which hungered for conquest. It all rather frightened and troubled her when she thought about it.

Poppy said:

"Never think about anything, my dear; it's certain to depress you."

But Eve did think and was duly depressed.

She had come to the conclusion, more than once of late, that the only thing to do in order to save herself from becoming a second Poppy, whom she would always secretly despise, was to fall really in love with some marvellous man and marry him. With the nice comfortable life-belt of matrimony tied about her waist she could then jump off the edge into the exciting and mysterious depths of love and life without fear of drowning.

This morning, as she lay in the hot steaming water, Eve regarded the pink tips of her toes, and contemplated unending rapture with Lawrence Hammond.

He was so much more attractive than that fatuous fellow, Reggie Coleman, for instance. He had an adorably ugly, fascinating face . . . and such hands . . . she shivered at the memory of those thrilling hands caressing her in the car last night. With Lawrence she would climb to the heights. She adored him—much more than she had ever

adored anybody. She would make an ideal wife ; she would be faithful and devoted. With him by her side she would sail forth into noble, unknown seas of peace and pleasure, and leave poor old Poppy swimming round in her murky little pond, waiting for the weeds to entangle her and drag her down.

As Eve climbed out of the bath and wrapped her rosy dripping body in a bath-sheet, she wiped the steam-clouded mirror and glanced at her reflection. She had sponged the vermilion from her lips. Her face was glowing ; charming in its natural beauty. Shining hazel-green eyes, ruffled brown head, tender curve of rounded cheek, delicate yet sensual nostrils.

She was beautiful, and she knew it. Surely Lawrence Hammond must recognise that beauty and fall for it ; surely he would not resist her when he saw her again. Last night he had been cold. He had drawn into a shell of reserve after their embrace. He had regarded her as a child and thought it wise to keep away from her. But to-morrow . . . she would see him to-morrow and make him change his mind.

She pictured him drawing her into his arms ; imagined herself relaxing in his embrace ; giving herself up to one of those wonderful long-drawn-out kisses. She felt shaken by the very force of her amorous imagination. She closed her eyes.

" Oh, Lawrence, Lawrence," she murmured.

CHAPTER III

I

OCTOBER 1st was a Wednesday, so Eve caught the "cheap-day" train from Haywards Heath up to London. Mr. Walton-Evans drove her to the station in his four-seater Humber, which he sometimes allowed her to drive herself, but he was using it for the shooting party to-day. He was disappointed that his daughter was not walking round with him.

"First day of the pheasants—you might have come, Eve," he grumbled. "You've always come other years."

"I know, Daddy, but I particularly want to go up to town to-day," she said.

"Well, get back in time for dinner, you gad-about," he said, as he kissed her affectionately good-bye.

As she travelled up to town in the unpleasantly crowded cheap train she thought only of Lawrence Hammond and the methods she would use in breaking down his reserve. Now that she had actually started out on the adventure, she felt a little troubled and uncertain of herself. To begin with, she was going up to town entirely on the off-chance of finding him there. Her heart sank at the idea that he might be away. It was astonishing how the thought of him obsessed her.

She had dressed with great care for the occasion. She was wearing a dark-blue foulard frock with a tight little bodice and rather full skirt, pleated from the hips. Over this a dark-blue cloth coat with long roll fox-fur collar and big cuffs. She had pinned a blue and grey flower, made of silk and georgette, on her shoulder, and she wore a dark-blue felt hat with the "vagabond" brim; a paste diamond ornament pinned diagonally across the crown. More than one admiring look was cast at the slim blue-clad figure by the people in her carriage.

The October morning was fine, but there was an autumnal "snap" in the air, and Eve felt quite chilled when at length

she stepped out of the train on to the platform at Victoria. She drew the fur collar close about her throat and hurried to the nearest telephone-box. Now her heart began to beat rapidly, and a slight colour tinged the clear pallor of her cheeks. She was about to telephone to Lawrence Hammond.

He had not given her his 'phone number, but she expected to find it in the book. He occupied furnished rooms with attendance in Crichton House, Half Moon Street. She found the number in the directory under "Crichton House," and stepped into the box. Her heart beat fast, and she trembled with sheer nerves. A man's voice—but not Hammond's—answered the call. Obviously a servant. Eve asked for Mr. Hammond. To her disappointment she was told that he had gone out.

"Is Mr. Hammond in town?" she inquired.

"Yes," the voice answered from the other end. "You may find him at his club, madam."

Eve hung up the receiver.

Her next move was to ring up Hammond's club. He had told her that he was a member of Bobby's club—in Piccadilly. There she was doomed to fresh disappointment. Mr. Hammond had apparently been in to fetch his letters and gone out again.

"Is he expected back to lunch?" she asked.

"Yes, he said he would come back to lunch, madam," answered the sleek voice of the telephone operator at the club.

Eve's hopes revived. She said nervously:

"Will you please give him this message. It is important. Miss Walton-Evans telephoned to say she is in town to-day, and would like Mr. Hammond to lunch with her if possible. She will wait in the lounge at the Piccadilly. If Mr. Hammond does not come by one-thirty, she will not expect him."

"I'll write the message down and see he gets it, miss," was the answer.

Eve walked out of the station and ran for a bus which would take her to Oxford Circus. She entered the bus, and gave herself up to despondent thought. It was all very unsatisfactory; not to have spoken to Lawrence, herself; to rely on a message like that. To begin with,

would he return to his club for lunch? If he did and received her invitation, would he accept it? Or would he consider it brazen and ignore it?

"Perhaps I have been too quick in taking the initiative again," she pondered wretchedly. "But I do want to see him so badly. He will be going back to Malma soon. I might never get another chance. . . ."

She spent a trying morning. Everything seemed to go wrong. It had been fine in Haywards Heath when she left. She had brought no umbrella. In town, about eleven o'clock, it began to drizzle. Eve disliked getting wet in her new blue coat and hat. She also disliked rushing for crowded buses. And she could not afford taxis everywhere. Mr. Walton-Evans gave her a generous allowance for a girl of her age, but it never seemed to be enough for Eve.

She wanted new silver evening shoes. She went to a shoe shop in Regent Street. They were out of her size—four and a half—in the shape she required. Fresh annoyance. She came out again feeling that a personal grievance had been done her. They had no right to be out of that size. Nothing went right. It was the longest morning she had ever spent in town. The hours seemed to drag. She wanted half-past one to come—and the chance of seeing Hammond.

At last she was in the Piccadilly lounge, sitting on one of the seats facing the door. She fingered her small parcels nervously, and watched the constant flow of people pass in and out of that door. Her heart beat fast all the time. She felt that sick, empty feeling one feels when one is wildly hoping, yet despairing at the same time of gaining one's heart's desire.

Every time she saw a lone man of Hammond's build or height come into the lounge her pulses jerked, and she stared eagerly at his face. Once or twice she thought she saw Hammond; half rose, cheeks burning, throat dry with excitement. But when the man drew nearer it was not Hammond, and she sat down again, her excitement fading.

Half-past one passed. At a quarter to two Eve was still waiting. But all excitement had gone, and her eyes were tragic. Hammond had not come. Either he had failed to get her message or he was ignoring it. Surely,

surely he would not ignore it if he got it, she told herself. Surely there was some good reason why he had not come.

At two o'clock everybody else who had been waiting seemed to have been joined by the friends they expected, and gone to lunch. Eve sat alone! By this time she felt quite sick with disappointment and misery. Hammond would not come now.

It was futile to go on waiting. She felt humiliated. The intense desire to see him was still there, but she did not see how she could possibly cheapen herself further by telephoning to him again. She must leave it now.

Hunger had gone. And in any case she felt too wretched to eat. With tears smarting in her eyes she walked to the writing-room in the hotel and wrote Hammond a short note. She did not express any of her wounded feelings, her bitter disappointment. With a pitiful attempt to be proud, she wrote coolly:

DEAR LAWRENCE,—Sorry you could not turn up to lunch. See you some other time, perhaps. It was cheery the other night, wasn't it?

Come down to H. Heath and see the Poor Parents one day, if it won't bore you.

Yours sincerely

EVE WALTON-EVANS.

It was not in the least what she wanted to say. Her heart was weeping: "Oh, Lawrence, Lawrence, I want you so!"

She put the note into an envelope, sealed it, then walked out of the Piccadilly. It was raining steadily now. Piccadilly looked grey and unattractive. London was horrid. The weather was horrid. Everything was horrid to Eve, now. She contemplated taking a train straight back home. Vaguely she thought of Daddy and the shooting.

"I hope it hasn't turned out wet for the pheasants," she reflected. And then: "I shall take a taxi to Half Moon Street and drop this note on Lawrence myself; make sure he gets it, in case he misunderstands my message at the club and thinks I was just throwing myself at him again."

Her one fear was that Hammond should think contemptuously of her.

She decided that she must have some sort of lunch. She walked to the nearest Fuller's, and ordered an omelette and some coffee—the lunch of the typical woman-shopper. The hot drink revived her drooping spirits a little, but she stared miserably round the shop as she ate and drank. She had meant to have such a wonderful lunch at the Piccadilly with *him*; she had dreamed impossible dreams of his being frightfully kind and nice to her, perhaps taking her to a cinema as it was a wet afternoon, then to tea somewhere. By the end of the day he would have been at her feet.

It was all a crushing disappointment.

She asked herself why Fate ordained that she must always develop a strong liking for the people who did not particularly want her. It was so exasperating. If Hammond had rushed to the Piccadilly in answer to her 'phone-call, like Bobby Richards would have done, she wouldn't want him half so badly. But now she felt the most unspeakable longing for him—for just one single opportunity to put things right between them.

At three o'clock she took a taxi to Crichton House in Half Moon Street. She intended going straight on from there to Victoria, and then home.

Of course she had a sneaking hope that she might find him in his rooms when she took that cold little letter there; but on the whole it was a delicious shock to her to see him standing in the entrance of the building when her taxi drew up before Crichton House.

At the sight of the slim graceful figure and attractive satyr-like face of Hammond, her heart gave a tremendous leap, and the colour rushed to her cheeks. She sprang out of the taxi and called to him.

"Lawrence!"

Hammond, on the point of entering Crichton House, turned, and saw the girl. His brows went up.

"Eve! Good Lord, what are you doing here?" he asked.

She felt joyous, uplifted, and utterly relieved at having run up against him like this. All her depression vanished. Youth and beauty and the strength to conquer were hers once again. The humiliated feeling seemed to disappear. She stood before him, looking at him, her eyes brilliant and soft, cheeks carmine.

"I—I came to deliver a note to you. I—I had no idea you'd be in," she stammered.

"A note for me? But how exciting. What about?" he asked.

His tone was amiable and his whole expression so encouraging that Eve's spirits soared yet higher.

"Wait a moment—I'll pay the taxi and let it go," she said.

She paid the man, and he drove away down Half Moon Street. Eve returned to Hammond. She seemed unconscious of the fact that it was raining and that her coat and hat were wet.

"Look here, you can't stand out here getting soaked," said Hammond, frowning as though a sudden, perplexing thought had struck him. "But I can't very well ask you into my rooms. A bachelor, you know—and you, a respectable young woman from Haywards Heath——" he broke off, smiling.

Eve smiled back. She was radiant and not to be denied.

"Oh, rot," she said. "I'm not a prude, and I'd like to talk to you a bit. How dare you be so rude to me? Ask me in at once."

Hammond hesitated. Until he saw Eve again this afternoon he had not given her a thought since the night of the drive from town down to the country in young Richards' car. But now that he saw her again the memory of that night and of the scene in the car returned to him. He thought of her young, ardent passion, the real innocence underlying it. He recalled her clinging arms and lips, her tears. He did not wish to reopen anything of that kind. He had not intended seeing her again. It was a distinct surprise to him to meet her here, like this, outside his rooms. He found himself thinking how very attractive the child looked to-day, with that glow on her face. The dark-blue coat and hat suited her.

"Don't be silly," Eve spoke again, in a laughing, excited voice. "Ask me in at once."

Hammond cleared his throat. He scowled at her.

"All wrong, you know, all wrong," he said. "You girls of to-day behave disgracefully."

"I like the way you talk—as though you were antique!" she laughed. "You've got a sitting-room, haven't you?"

"Of sorts, yes. Oh, well, come on," he said weakly. "You can't stand here in the rain."

She felt exalted. She accompanied him into the building, feeling that she was treading on air. The whole aspect of the world had changed for her now that she had met Lawrence and he was being so nice to her. She told herself that she must act sensibly; do all the things she had planned to do, yesterday, when she had experienced such remorse for making herself cheap in his eyes.

2

Hammond's rooms were on the third floor. There was no lift. They ascended some stone stairs, then Hammond unlocked a door on the right which led into his sitting-room. Adjoining this room were a small bedroom and bathroom. It was like a tiny flat.

Eve walked round the sitting-room examining everything with very feminine curiosity. The atmosphere was warm. The radiators were full on. Eve appreciated the heat after the chill damp air outside. But Lawrence immediately flung open a window.

"They keep the place too darned hot," he said.

"I like heat," said Eve. "And you ought to, considering that you live abroad."

"I get enough of it there," he smiled.

"Don't you like Malma?"

"For some things. My job's there."

"Do tell me about your job," said Eve.

"It's very dull. Making the niggers work on a rubber-estate," he said. "Won't you take off your coat and sit down? Here's a comfy chair by the fireplace."

He had taken off his own coat and hat and flung them on the bed in the adjoining room. Now he pulled a leather-covered arm-chair forward for Eve. He drew a cigarette-case from his pocket. He gave her a glance, half-bantering, half-critical.

"All wrong," he said again. "The valet who does these rooms will have a fit if he finds you here. Young women do not as a rule frequent these rooms which are supposed to be sacred to the stern bachelor."

"All right, Stern Bachelor," said Eve gaily. "I won't eat you."

"How do you know you won't get eaten, though?"

Hammond spoke lightly on the spur of the moment. But when he saw the responsive flush and glow in the girl's face he immediately regretted what he had said.

"The Lord knows I've got to be careful with this child," he thought grimly. "She's as emotional in broad daylight as she is at night."

But he was struck, once more, by a delightful sparkling quality in her beauty as he helped her off with her coat, and looked at the slim rounded figure in the blue and grey foulard frock.

"That's a very charming dress," he said.

"Do you like it? It's ages old," said Eve.

She seated herself in the arm-chair, and accepted a cigarette from him. He lit it for her. She smoked happily in silence for a moment. She was trying so hard to appear cool and unconcerned; not to show him how thrilled she was by this, her first visit to any man's rooms; and how much more thrilled she was to be alone with him.

Hammond did not sit down. He balanced himself on the edge of a small table opposite her.

"Now tell me all about this exciting note you were bringing me. Where is it?"

"Oh, I shan't give it to you now," said Eve. "As a matter of fact I 'phoned to you at your club and asked you to lunch with me, and they said they'd give you the message. You didn't turn up, so I didn't wait. . . ." She added the lie in a casual tone. Not for worlds would she let Hammond know the stupid anguish of disappointment and misery she had suffered while she waited in the lounge of the Piccadilly.

"It was very charming of you to ask me to lunch," said Hammond. "I'm afraid I didn't go back to my club to lunch. I met a fellow who was at Lancing with me—hadn't seen him for years—and he asked me to lunch with him at the National Liberal, so I did. So sorry, Eve. I do hope you didn't wait."

"Oh, *rather* not," said Eve. Her heart was singing within her. Hammond hadn't ignored her message.

"How d'you like my digs?" he asked. "It's not my furniture, of course. All my things are out in Malma."

Eve looked round the room.

The colouring was neutral : pale-brown walls, dark-brown carpet, shabby leather chairs, olive-green curtains, framing a window hung with cream net which shut out the grey gloom of the day. There was a clock on the mantelpiece ; two pipes ; a row of uniform books marked " R. L. Stevenson." These things were reflected in a large mahogany-framed oval mirror which was hung over the fireplace. Very dull, Eve thought, with a smile. A typical bachelor's room.

Hammond followed her gaze.

" Unexciting sort of room, what ? " he said.

" I like it," she said. " It's so plain. I hate a room crammed full of things, like Mummy's frightful drawing-room. I think when I'm married I shall have a room like yours for my drawing-room."

" Oh, a little more attractive than mine, I hope," said Hammond. " This isn't a woman's room at all. Not a flower or a cushion or a photograph in it."

" Not a photograph," she admitted, looking round. " I suppose you don't like them."

" Hate 'em," he said briefly. " Photographs are abominations. They're rarely if ever like the original, they're always artificial, and, to me, they're dead, flat things with set, flat expressions. One can surely remember the faces one likes without having a ghastly black and white reproduction in a frame to jog one's memory."

Eve stared at him. Lawrence Hammond was a strange, hard man, she thought. His very hardness attracted her. He was so different from herself. She loved photographs. She was not happy until she triumphantly carried off the likeness of her pet friend of the moment, framed it, and hung it in her bedroom.

" I don't quite agree with you," she said. " I think photos are friendly things. I like them all round me."

" Ugh, no ! " said Hammond, with a shiver. " Awful grinning faces ! Can't abide the idea of any over my little bed."

" Oh, you are an extraordinary man ! " said Eve, looking at him with bewildered eyes. " You have such funny ideas."

" Mad, eh ? " he said, with his rather slow smile, which

cut two deep lines on either cheek, and made his satyr-face so attractive. "Or just perverse. I refuse to do most things that other people do. But look here, I'm talking a lot of rubbish and not entertaining my guest. What shall I do to amuse you?"

"You are amusing me."

"You're easily entertained, child." He got up from the table on which he was balancing himself, and walked to the window. "Still pelting. This damned English climate. Ugh! It's depressing."

"I expect you want to get back to Malma," she said, following him with her gaze rather wistfully.

"I do," he said. "I've enjoyed my holiday up to a point, but I shall be quite pleased to go out East again."

"Tell me about it," she said. "About your bungalow and everything."

"It's quite a nice bungalow," he smiled. "And I share it with a fellow called Digby. He's my partner. He's a good chap—a bit older than I am, and much too fat. But he's one of the best, and we get on very well together. The estate's just beginning to look up. Up till this year we've been poor men, Lord knows!"

Eve reflected that the fat Digby was fortunate to be liked by Lawrence, and to be allowed the privilege of sharing his home and working with him.

"Tell me more," she said.

Her ardent interest in his affairs amused the man. Few men can resist the subtle flattery of being asked to talk about themselves—especially when the request is made by a very pretty girl.

He walked back to the fireplace and stood there, leaning one elbow on it, looking thoughtfully down at Eve. She had forgotten to smoke. The cigarette was burning away in her fingers. Was she really so interested in him? he wondered. Or was this just a charming pose?

He answered her questions, but with a certain amount of reticence. He had led a very normal life—the life of a man who has travelled widely and had many occupations. He had nothing in particular to conceal. But there are generally one or two episodes in a man's career of which he does not speak; and where women were concerned Hammond's lips were shut and sealed. Nothing would

induce him to discuss one woman with another. He knew that Eve was full of curiosity to know whether he had had any "affairs," and with whom. But her curiosity on that score remained unsatisfied.

"I've no ties of any kind and have never wanted 'em," he said, lighting his second cigarette with the end of the first. "My people died when I was a kid. I was brought up by a rather grim aunt who passed out of this life when I was eighteen, and, I must say, I went to her funeral cheerfully, poor old girl. My father left me a hundred a year, and with that I landed in South America at the age of nineteen, and worked on a silver-mine. After two years of that, I had accumulated a bit of money and went to New York to an oil-company. That was a failure, and I got back to England, broke. I started again in the East in the Penlop Company, got sick of that, and went to Canada—then out East. I'm afraid I've been a rolling stone, Eve. I've gathered a bit of moss, but not enough. It's a foolish temperament—a sort of fever for change and travel."

"I think it must be marvellous—to do what you've done—anything, everything," she said.

"Still, it's the people who stick to one grindstone who make the money," he said.

"And what a dull time they have!"

"True. But it seems senseless to go on making small fortunes and losing 'em," said Hammond. "I'm going to try and settle down in Malma with old Digby for a bit. I must. Otherwise, I shall be poverty-stricken in my old age."

"You'll have to find a rich widow, and marry her!" Eve laughed.

"Not a bad idea," he said.

"I'd like to bet you never would marry a woman for money," said Eve, more seriously. "You'd never want to lose your independence to such an extent."

"Wise little owl," he said.

"Besides, no decent man would marry a rich woman just for the sake of her money."

"How do you know I'm decent?"

"I'm sure you are," she said.

"I assure you I'm a cheerful blackguard, my dear

child," he said. "And that being the case I must guard your youthful and unblemished reputation, and send you home before any of the fellows I know turn up unexpectedly for the drink which they know reposes in my cupboard."

Eve's cheeks grew pink; her eyes disappointed.

"No, Lawrence, don't send me home yet."

"But I ought to."

"And you call yourself a cheerful blackguard," she jeered. "And you're afraid to let me sit in your rooms two seconds!"

Hammond's brows contracted. He looked at her, and then shook his head, his lips pursed.

"Eve, my child, you'll come to a sticky end if you persist in remaining in bachelors' digs unchaperoned."

"Oh, don't be so ridiculous," she said, throwing her cigarette-end into the fireplace. "I'm not a baby."

"Nineteen, and not a baby! Ye gods!"

"Well, the modern girl knows her way about," said Eve, with an arrogance which made him suddenly fling back his head and roar with laughter. "Don't laugh at me," she added, stamping her foot. "Oh, I know you think me a stupid little fool."

"Far from it. You're very intelligent. But I do think you young maidens of nineteen twenty-seven take a lot of risks," he said.

"Is it a risk, staying here with you?" she challenged him.

He looked down at the pretty, flushed face, and found it charming. He had nothing to do. Ordinarily, on a wet, depressing day of this kind, he would go to the club and play bridge or poker. But it was very pleasant here in this warm, cosy room; this slim girl with her green challenging eyes and red lips, seated opposite him in the deep arm-chair; slender legs in their gossamer stockings crossed like a boy's. She had beautiful ankles.

The very knowledge that he was in the mood for feminine companionship this afternoon made Hammond wary of himself. He said, rather more sharply than he meant to speak:

"I don't know about there being any risk with me, my dear child, but, joking apart, you can't stay here."

Eve stood up. She tried not to show him that she was disappointed. She said :

" Oh, all right. I'll go home."

A telephone-bell rang. Hammond frowned, and walked to the instrument, which stood on a writing-table in front of the window.

" Excuse me a second, Eve," he said. Then, lifting the receiver, " Hello ! "

Eve waited, tapping a foot against the carpet. Her mouth was sulky. She hated being sent home. She wondered jealously if another woman was at this very moment telephoning to Hammond.

He undeceived her on that point very quickly.

He put his hand over the mouth of the telephone and turned to her. " Eve, Bobby Richards is on the other end of the wire. He wants me to go to some frightful show in someone's studio in Chelsea, and bring a lady with me. I don't want to go, but if it amuses you——"

" Oh, Lawrence ! " said Eve. " I'd adore it."

" I suppose I must take you, then," he smiled. He turned back to the 'phone. " Right-oh, Bobby," he said. " Eve Walton-Evans—yes. She's here. I'll bring her along."

He hung up the receiver. Eve said joyously :

" Oh, what fun, Lawrence ! Now I shan't have to go home like a naughty child. I'm so glad Bobby rang up. Was he surprised to find me here with you ? "

" Not a bit," said Hammond. " He said, ' How marvellous,' when I told him."

" He would ! " laughed Eve. Lawrence Hammond shook his head at her.

" You're leading an old bachelor into bad ways, my child," he said. " Where is this God-forsaken studio ? Do you know the folk ? Bobby said a friend called Toffee Marsden. But surely there can't be a human being called Toffee Anything ? "

Eve laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

" Oh, Lawrence ! But there is—a girl—I know who Bobby means. She is one of his friends—Poppy's crowd. I met her once when I was up in town with Poppy."

" Is it respectable, or will it shatter my reputation ? "

"I don't know whether it's respectable or not, but I do know Toffee Marsden is the most extraordinary person—jolly fascinating, too."

"Who and what is she?"

"Just a girl on her own," said Eve. "She's half South American, and got tons of money, and has a beautiful flat in Chelsea."

"Doesn't sound to me as though she ought to have a flat in Chelsea," said Lawrence. "I'm beginning to regret my rashness in telling that boy I'd take you to this show. He says it's just a 'rag,' and Miss Marsden likes anybody to turn up. But what about your family?"

"Oh, Lawrence, leave my family out of it, and don't be so too frightfully cautious," said Eve, groaning.

"I assure you I don't like studio-rags—I'm not young enough——" began Hammond.

Eve took his arm.

"Come on," she said. "You're going to take me."

"Exasperating young woman," said Hammond.

But he took her, and Eve was victorious, bubbling over with enthusiasm. A studio-rag at Toffee Marsden's place was certain to be fun, and to go with Lawrence—well, she had not expected such a piece of luck.

"The name 'Toffee' annoys me," said Lawrence, when they were in the taxi which was driving them through the rain to Miss Marsden's studio. "You must admit it's ghastly."

"She's always been called Toffee so far as I know," said Eve. "Poppy knows her better than I do. Poppy says she was left a lot of money by her parents when she was still at school. Now she's only twenty-four. She owns race-horses, a motor-boat, a sports Bentley, and she's most amusing and pretty."

"It oughtn't to be allowed," said Hammond. "Horrible young woman!"

"She looks like a boy," continued Eve. "Very thin and sun-browned, Eton-cropped hair; and she can sing like a boy, in a tenor voice. Sometimes she puts on a man's dinner-jacket and trousers, and people mistake her for a boy—she's great fun!"

"It sounds worse and worse. I'm filled with gloom at

the thought of meeting her," said Hammond. "If she's wearing trousers this afternoon, I shall feel compelled to fly!"

3

Toffee's studio—one of those long, delightfully irregular rooms one can find in the old Chelsea houses—was a dim, queer world—futurist; decorated to create an artistic effect. Black walls hung with unframed sketches, bizarre oils; lurid splashes of colour suggesting a medley of things. pale-green flesh-tints of women's nude bodies, mysterious trees, blood-red sunsets, incomprehensible figures painted with bold, rude strokes in colours that hurt and yet fascinated. A polished oak floor with one or two good rugs and plenty of cushions and enormous silk pouffes; a baby-grand piano littered with music; an alcove, curtained with some transparent gold material; a divan covered with coloured cushions, suggestive of a harem. There were no chairs. Everybody sat on cushions on the floor. The grey light of the afternoon had been already shut out by black velvet curtains. The studio was drenched in dim, golden light from wax candles flickering in tall candelabra on either side of the fireplace. To Eve it was enormously attractive.

But the atmosphere struck Lawrence Hammond, when he entered the room, like a hot, evil blast. The bizarre effect left him unmoved. He had seen studios like this in other parts of the globe—rooms more wild and strange—in Paris, in China, in Malma. It bored him. He could understand, however, that, to Eve's young and inexperienced eye, it was all wonderful. It suggested something unconventional, unrestrained. Like Toffee Marsden herself.

Eve pointed out their hostess, who made no effort to greet them. She was sitting at the piano, playing a negro melody, which she crooned in the curious voice which Eve had described as "tenor." The short tailored skirt she wore was scarcely visible. Perched on the stool, she might have been a boy; white silk shirt open at the throat; black hair, satin-smooth, close-cropped, brushed off her

ears ; face and neck brown from the sun ; eyes narrow, heavy-lidded, with very thick black lashes. Only the mouth gave away her sex—a full curling mouth, heavily carmined. She looked wicked. She wanted to look wicked. She was the type to go any lengths, do any daring deed for the sake of making a reputation.

To Lawrence, this girl at the piano—only twenty-four—was rather a sinister young woman. He watched her hands moving over the white keys of the piano ; small, brown, boyish hands. According to Eve they could grip the wheel of a Bentley racer or steer a motor-boat as skilfully as they could extract soft southern melodies from her piano. Interesting, in a fashion. " Toffee ! " Well, perhaps the name suited her after all.

" What do you think of her, Lawrence ? " whispered Eve.

" Never mind," said Hammond.

Eve looked through the dim haze of the big room. There were so many people. Some reclined on cushions ; some strolled around the studio. There were more girls present than men. Everybody appeared to be smoking and drinking cocktails. And yes, of course, Poppy was there, her round impudent face wreathed in smiles ; her blue eyes sparkling. She was sharing a large cushion with a slim, fair-haired man who was obviously amusing her. She was laughing loudly. Eve had never seen him before, but Lawrence knew him by sight.

" Norman Roxley," he said briefly. " The author of that abominable play we saw the other night."

" Oh, really ! " exclaimed Eve.

" Degenerate," said Lawrence.

" Oh, Lawrence, but he must be awfully clever."

" I don't know why. It isn't at all clever to get a show on the boards these days. It's just a question of what influence there is behind one and how much muck the censor will let one keep in the play. He is lucky. His only cleverness lies in the way he fools the public into thinking him a genius."

" You *are* cynical," said Eve.

" Sorry," he said. " I'm afraid I'm no fun to go out with. Shall I clear out and leave you here to enjoy yourself, my dear ? "

But Eve said :

"No—oh, please don't go!"

She was too much in love with Lawrence Hammond to enjoy even this intriguing studio show without him. So Hammond stayed, and Eve induced him to share a cushion with her at the farther end of the studio, facing the piano. As they passed Poppy and her playwright, Eve said a few gay words. Poppy smiled up at her.

"Got your young man with you, my dear. Splendid!" she said. "How did you manage it?"

Eve shrugged her shoulders and passed on. She positively disliked Poppy in that moment. She hoped Lawrence had not heard. He would very much dislike being called "her young man."

Hammond seated himself on the floor gloomily.

"Don't we have to greet our hostess?" he asked.

"No—that doesn't matter," said Eve.

"This is no place for me," said Lawrence. "Lord! What have we here?"

A manservant was handing them cocktails—pale milky liquid in tall slender glasses. Eve took one, sniffed at it, then wrinkled her nose.

"Don't like it," she said.

Hammond sipped his, and pursed his lips.

"H'm—*absinthe* cocktails. Not for little girls," he said.

"You can drink mine," said Eve.

"My dear child, do you want me to roll home?"

"Yes," she laughed, her eyes shining at him. She was very happy, and very proud of being with him. All these other people were, as he said, degenerate. But Hammond was different, a man—wise and experienced—and she loved him.

Toffee Marsden rose from the piano-stool. She stood like a boy, legs apart, hands thrust in the pockets of her skirt. Somebody handed her a cocktail. She drank it down, and looked under her heavy lids round the studio. She called out in her deep voice.

"Bobby—come and amuse us."

Bobby Richards appeared from nowhere, still clutching his cocktail glass.

"Oh, *hell*, Toffee—must I?" he said affectedly.

"Oh, *hell*—yes," said Toffee. "You've got a face like a love-sick girl, but you can sing funny songs. Go and sing

one now, and if it isn't funny you shan't have any more to drink."

"Oh, hell," Bobby began to bleat again, his limpid, girlish eyes looking round the room for sympathy.

"Go on, Bobby!" sang out some girl.

Eve giggled.

"I didn't know Bobby could sing," she whispered.

"He can't," said Lawrence drily. "Listen!"

Bobby had had his cocktail glass removed from him by Toffee. He was now sitting at the piano, singing to his own accompaniment—a foolish, suggestive little song, all about Adam and Eve and the apple. He had no voice; recited rather than sang the suggestive words, with an angelic look on his round pink face. He might have been a choir-boy chanting a hymn. The effect caused much amusement. A ripple of laughter went round the room.

Eve looked back at Hammond.

"Isn't he an idiot?" she murmured.

"Not quite such an idiot as he seems," said Lawrence.

"He wants a damn good kick—and——"

His voice was drowned in a roar of laughter. Bobby had just lisped a particularly daring line. Hammond caught the gist of it and smiled against his will; then gave a quick look at the girl on the cushion beside him. She was laughing. He was certain she did not know why she laughed.

"Did you understand that, Eve?" he asked.

"N-no, not quite," she admitted unwillingly.

"I thought not," said Hammond. "My dear, I ought not to have brought you to this sort of show—with such a crowd. They're rotten—all of 'em."

Eve bit her lip.

Wasn't Lawrence Hammond being a little too priggish and prosy, she wondered. It rather spoiled things for her to know that Lawrence despised it all. At the same time he went up in her estimation. He wasn't a prig at heart; merely superior to the young, modern set. If he would relax a little . . . he would be wonderful. She thought of him as he had been that night in the Packard, going down to Haywards Heath . . . when passion had driven away his scruples, and he had wanted her.

Her heart jerked and her throat felt suddenly hot.

"Why can't I make him like that again?" she thought.

"Why can't I make him love me? I love him *terribly*. There isn't a man in this studio to touch him. There isn't a man anywhere . . . so wonderful as Lawrence!"

Bobby finished his song and rose from the piano. He was applauded from all sides. Drinks were pushed into both his hands. He laughed and protested. He called to Toffee.

"Now, Toffee, what about one of your marvellous dances."

"Yes, come on, Toffee—dance for us!" said one or two of the others.

"This will be fun," whispered Eve.

Hammond lit a cigarette and crossed his arms over his bent knees. Toffee vanished from the studio, and came back in an incredibly short time, completely transformed from boy to girl—a native girl, with smooth bare legs and arms, a short beaded skirt, strings of coloured beads dangling from her throat, a wreath of scarlet flowers round her black head.

On bare, slender feet she poised a moment at the entrance of the studio, hands on her hips. From a concealed gramophone there came a Hawaiian melody, played on the velvet strings of a ukulele. There was a great deal of clapping and cheering. Then silence.

Toffee began to dance.

Eve watched, her fascinated gaze never leaving Toffee's swaying, graceful body. Hammond watched, and was forced to appreciate the sleek beauty of the girl's movements. She was more Southern than English, certainly—he could see the South American blood in her now. There was sensuality in every curve of her body, every gesture of her hands, every sway of the slim hips. She caught and held him, despite himself.

The silence in the gold dusk of the studio became intense. The ukulele twanged out its plaintive lilting melody. Toffee Marsden took off her wreath of flowers; flung it in the air; clapped her hands and spun round on her toes.

Eve looked at Hammond with shining eyes.

"Isn't she lovely?" she breathed.

Hammond had finished his second *absinthe* cocktail. He knew himself a fool, drinking Eve's as well as his own. He also realised that he was a fool to stay here and be

hypnotised by this warm perfumed studio . . . carried away by the sensuality of Toffee's dance. But his clear cynical brain was just a little drowsy and clouded now, and when Eve turned round to him he became conscious of the light weight of her body against his. Lazily he put an arm about her waist.

"Glad you're enjoying it, my child," he whispered.

Eve drew a deep breath as she felt that arm about her. Now . . . now Lawrence was going to relax . . . he was beginning to feel the allure of the moment. She turned back to look once more at the dancer, not daring to move, terrified lest Lawrence should take his arm away again. She thought :

"I love him. . . . I do love him. . . . He's got to say he loves me before I go home to-night."

Home seemed a long way away from Toffee Marsden's studio. Eve did not care what the time was or whether she missed her train back to Haywards Heath or not. She forgot that her father was holding a dinner after his shooting party, and that she was expected back by seven o'clock. She flung herself into the intoxication of the moment. She was sitting here on the cushion with Lawrence's arm around her. She felt suddenly drunk with happiness, as only extreme youth can feel—oblivious of any yesterdays or to-morrows.

The record came to an end. Toffee finished her dance, and fled from the studio amidst roars and cheers of applause. She refused to dance again, and came back in a few moments in her boyish shirt-blouse and skirt, a cigarette between her lips.

"That's enough of that rot," she said. "Now, then, what's the next entertainment?"

A red-haired girl in a black lace dress said :

"Make Norman recite to us."

"Yes, come on, Norman—say your little piece," said Toffee.

"That swine——" muttered Hammond. But Eve turned and put a slim hand over his mouth. She laughed at him excitedly.

"Now, Lawrence, you've got to be good, and stop all your horrid criticisms."

He removed his arm from her waist. Her heart sank,

Was the golden moment over, so soon? Was Lawrence going to be hard again? She prayed, under her breath, like a foolish child:

"God . . . *make him love me. . .*"

Even as she said the prayer she realised that it was foolish. What had God to do with it after all?

Norman Roxley seated himself on the edge of a small lacquer table, folded his arms, and suddenly began to speak. Immediately there was silence in the studio again. Everybody listened with bated breath. Lawrence felt himself again being drawn into the fascination of the thing. Roxley was degenerate. His pallid face, his sagging mouth, his over-brilliant eyes gave him away. But he had a flair for amusing or interesting the public, for creating an effect. And he had an attractive voice—low, husky, dreamy. Within a few seconds he had his audience under a spell . . . hushed . . . attentive.

Lawrence—not a prolific reader of the poets—did not know whom Roxley was quoting, but Eve, who knew her poets, and particularly loved this one, said under her breath:

"Oh, how ripping! Swinburne—listen, Lawrence."

Norman Roxley spoke the passionate words with a quiet intensity.

"Would I lose you now? Would I take you then,

If I lose you now that my heart has need?

And, come what may after death to men,

What thing worth this will the dead years breed?

Lose life, lose all; but at least I know,

O sweet life's love, having loved you so,

Had I reached you on earth, I should lose not again

In death nor life, nor in dream or deed."

Eve was trembling. She thought:

"That's how I feel about Lawrence—oh, if only he would feel it!"

Once more she was the infatuated schoolgirl, but he was just man—stirred by the sheer, undeniable beauty of the impassioned words and the presence of the charming girl so close to him. His arm stole about her again and drew her nearer him. She flushed, and turned from his gaze. She thought she would die of happiness when she felt his

right hand take her wrist . . . move softly up and down her arm.

She was completely caught and meshed in the sensual web which was being spun across that hot and golden studio. She felt weak, powerless to move. She could not possibly have moved away from Lawrence's arm. She wanted him to go on stroking her arm—for ever. Sharp ecstasy smote her when she felt his lips against the back of her neck. She thought :

“ Perhaps he loves me. . . . ”

But Hammond was thinking :

“ I'm being a cad, and she wants me to be. I'm a sickening fool to stay. . . . ”

But he stayed.

Norman Roxley finished his recitation. He was warmly applauded. As he walked back to his cushion, Eve heard Poppy's gay voice :

“ Darling, how beautifully you said that. Come and be kissed ! ”

Toffee Marsden sang out :

“ Let's all dance. ”

Somebody took up the rugs ; somebody else put a record on the priceless, electrically-run gramophone. Jack Hylton's band was playing “ And Then My Heart Stood Still. ”

In a few moments the studio was alive with noise . . . laughter . . . shuffling feet. Toffee danced with Bobby Richards ; Poppy swayed wildly in the arms of her author.

Eve found herself dancing in Lawrence Hammond's arms. She was very excited and flushed. He told himself that he had never seen the child look prettier. He held the slim figure in the blue foulard frock very tightly against him. He was not a very good dancer, but they did not have to dance. The studio was so crowded that it was just a question of holding one's partner and moving—gradually.

I took one look at you . . .

'Twas all I meant to do,

And then my heart stood still !

Hammond smiled down at Eve's upturned face.

“ Happy ? ” he said.

"Frightfully," she said.

"You are a funny kid," he said, and held her a little tighter. She put a hand round the back of his neck, growing more reckless. She felt mad . . . everybody was mad . . . and Lawrence, too, so what did it matter?

The dance finished. And then there were more drinks—champagne. It was tea-time, but nobody wanted tea except Eve, who would have died before she admitted it. She sipped the top off her champagne. Hammond, who was thirsty after his dance, drank several glasses. He began to think the studio-rag rather amusing. Eve was being extraordinarily sweet to him, and she was the prettiest girl in the room. She wanted him to be nice to her. Well, why not? It really didn't matter.

They danced again.

It was a quarter-past seven when Eve and Lawrence Hammond came out of Toffee Marsden's house. Neither of them had realised the lateness of the hour, and Eve had completely forgotten that she was due to return home to attend her father's shooting-dinner.

It was quite dark when they emerged from the studio, and still raining. Eve held on to Hammond's arm. She was still over-excited—very flushed and tired. For the last hour they had been dancing. Hammond's face was pale. His eyes looked very dark. He had had just a little too much to drink, and he knew it.

"Phew—the heat in that room!" he muttered, as they stood on the pavement.

Eve looked at her wrist-watch.

"Oh, my God—it's nearly half-past seven, and the Parents expect me home for dinner. I shall get into a frightful row."

"Damn," said Hammond. "It's my fault. I should have seen that you caught your train. When is the next?"

"I don't know," she said.

She really did not care very much. Lawrence had been so wonderful at Toffee's studio. She was sure that he was in love with her, now. She wanted him to kiss her—frightfully. She thrilled when he hailed a taxi.

"I wonder what he means to do now," she thought.

She heard him give the address of his rooms, and her

eyes dilated. When they were in the taxi, Hammond said :
" I've got an A.B.C. in my digs. We'll look up the next train, old thing."

" Yes, right you are," she said.

Then she held out her hands to him.

" Oh, Lawrence ! " she whispered.

Hammond was still a little excited, after the dancing and the drinks and the whole atmosphere of the place. Weakly he took Eve into his arms.

" Bad child," he murmured.

She lifted her lips eagerly for his kiss. She was strung up to a high pitch of emotional ecstasy. As his lips closed over her mouth, fulfilling her desires, the dreams and desires of two long days, she felt altogether abandoned. She clung to him, and kept saying his name between the long kisses :

" Lawrence . . . oh, Lawrence . . . Lawrence . . . "

He did not speak, but he held and kissed her, all the way from Chelsea, until her face was burning from the rough pressure of his lips, and her lips hurt.

Somewhere at the back of her mind she remembered all the good resolutions she had taken after the other night with Hammond—her intention to be cool and reserved, not to let this man think her easy game. But where were the resolutions now? In the very dim background. In his arms, learning all the feverish passion which he was the first to teach her, she was a little pagan without reserve.

Hammond did not speak to her until they were up in his sitting-room again. It was cool and quiet and sombre here after Toffee's exotic studio. Eve flung her hat on to a chair, pushed back her tumbled hair, then walked mutely into his arms, and hid her face against his shoulder.

" Oh, Lawrence, Lawrence, how I love you," she said, in a passionate undertone.

Just for an instant he held her ; put his lips against the top of the shingled brown head. But, back here in the quiet austerity of his bachelor rooms, Lawrence Hammond felt himself again. He was quiet, sobered. The glamour of the moment had passed for him. But he saw that in Eve the madness remained, and he was suddenly ashamed of himself for the encouragement he had given her.

Gently he put her away from him.

"I must find the A.B.C.," he said, in a matter-of-fact voice.

Eve looked at him dazedly.

"No—Lawrence—wait——"

He pulled out his cigarette-case without looking at her.

"Yes, my dear?"

She was all nerves—trembling, white now instead of red. He made it so difficult . . . it was so hateful . . . this rapid change of feeling on his part. She could not understand it.

"Lawrence," she said. "Not yet—I don't want to go yet."

"Oh, but you must," he said.

"Lawrence—I—take me in your arms again."

"Better not, old thing," he said. "Look here—we've behaved badly enough as it is, this afternoon. I had no right to take you to that rotten show nor to drink all that stuff. I'm sorry I lost my head in the taxi a bit."

She stared at him, dumb, wide-eyed. She felt as though he had put a pin straight through the balloon of her happiness. He saw the sick look in her eyes and hated himself. He was going to hurt her, and he knew it. But it was the second time she had asked for it.

"God, how young she is," he thought. "How different she'll be in ten years' time. I'd like to see her at twenty-nine."

Aloud he said:

"Pull yourself together, Eve, my child. It's been fun, but—yes, I always have a 'but' ready. You'll hate me soon, won't you?"

"No, no. But, Lawrence, I haven't been just fooling," she said, clasping her hands very tightly behind her back, her white young face lifted to his. "Have you?"

"Of course I have," he said lightly. "Don't be absurd, dear. It wasn't serious on either of our parts."

"Oh, then, you don't believe that I love you."

"Of course I don't, you foolish infant. You'll howl with laughter at yourself to-morrow."

He was deliberately being brutal. He thought it high time Eve went home. He mentally vowed not to see her again. This time he really would end things. He didn't trust himself. He spoke curtly now:

"Listen, Eve. You've been charming to me, and you're very attractive—and that's the trouble. You're too attractive and too charming to me. I'm not a marrying man, Eve, and I'm not going to play with fire. I might with some women—but not with you. I happen to respect you. Now, buck up, silly infant, and let's find this A.B.C."

Eve's romantic castles crashed about her. She stood quite still. She felt cold and sick. She passed from one extreme to another—from the height of excitement and happiness to the depths of misery and despair. For the second time she had failed with Lawrence Hammond. All his sweetness to her in Toffee's studio, all his kisses, his caresses in the taxi—they had all meant nothing to him. He didn't really care a rap about her.

Suddenly she turned and flung herself into a chair, and hid her pale shamed face on her arm. Her body shook with sobs.

Hammond glanced swiftly up at her from the A.B.C. he had been studying. She was crying. He hated to see her cry. She had been so gay, so happy. He put down the time-table, walked over to her chair, and sat on the arm of it. He put an arm lightly around her.

"Don't do this, for God's sake, old thing," he said. "It worries me. I feel I've hurt you."

"N-no—you h-haven't," she said, trying to control herself. "It's all m-my fault."

"Rot," he said. "Only, really, child, you take life much too seriously. Have your good times with discretion and care, but don't upset yourself over them, and don't go round imagining you're in love with prosy old fossils like myself."

"You're n-not a fossil, Lawrence."

"I'm years older than you are, and a confirmed bachelor. My dear, in ten years' time you'll be married to some nice fellow, and I shall be a horrid old man with soup all down my waistcoat. I'll come and visit you and say, 'Do you remember when you behaved scandalously with me in a taxi in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and twenty-seven?'" He broke off, laughing, and patted her head. "Come on, old thing. Dry your eyes and buck up!"

She echoed the laugh forlornly; blew her nose and tried to "buck up." But she felt acutely miserable—too

humiliated to meet Hammond's gaze. He was being awfully kind and nice—but what must he think of her? And what did she think of herself? Of course it was absurd for him to say he would find her married in ten years' time. She would *never* marry now. The thought of marriage with any other man revolted her.

To Hammond's relief she made no further allusion to the proceedings of the afternoon. She vanished into his bedroom, washed her face, powdered her nose, put on her hat, and prepared herself to catch the 8.35 back to Haywards Heath.

"She really is a nice kid," he thought. "If I were twenty-one I'd marry her and make her unhappy for ever. God help any woman who ties herself up to me!"

He felt very inclined to take Eve in his arms and hug her, kiss her forlorn little face. But he desisted. It wouldn't be wise. But she was really very plucky, now. Pride had returned to the rescue. She kept up a flow of talk about anything and nothing, until it was time for her to depart for Victoria.

"I feel you ought to have had a bite of dinner," he said, before she left. "It's getting on for eight."

Eve assured him she did not want anything—could not have eaten anything. She held out her hand, and said:

"Well, good-bye, Lawrence," in a stiff little voice.

"Good-bye, old thing," he said. "Thanks for a most amusing afternoon. Be good. Next time I'm back from Malma I'll come and look you up."

"Do," she said.

And that was her parting from Lawrence Hammond. That was the end of her wild dream of perpetual love with him. It seemed a very poor, wretched sort of ending. And she loved him so—she was sure it was real, deathless love. All the way down to Haywards Heath she sat huddled in a corner of the gloomy, badly-lit third-class carriage, and felt so cold and wretched that she wished she had never been born. Never, never would she see Lawrence again. It was all over. Never again feel his kisses on her lips or his arms caressing her. Unbearable agony. There was nobody in the world like Lawrence, and never would be or could be again.

The journey to Haywards Heath seemed endless. As

the train jolted along through the wet cold night, Eve remembered that she had asked Daddy to meet the earlier train. There would be nobody to meet her now. She would have to get a taxi back. Damn! She couldn't afford it, and Mummy wouldn't pay; she would be too cross because her daughter had not turned up to dine with their guests. It would be a fresh grievance for Mummy. Damn, again! Everything was horrid. It was a rotten world. Oh, how miserable she was! And this train was taking her farther and farther from Lawrence.

If only she could go back . . . if only he wanted her . . . if only she had been irresistible. She was pretty, but not pretty enough or clever enough to win Lawrence. Wonderful Lawrence!

At 9.26 Eve reached Haywards Heath station and took a taxi from the garage opposite. She felt that this was a most dismal ending to a day which had commenced pleasantly.

She wondered what Lawrence was doing, this moment, and if he realised how much she loved him, what a tragedy this was for her. Then she reached home and began to think about the excuses she must make to the Poor Parents for her absence from the dinner-party.

BOOK II

EVE AND MICHAEL

CHAPTER I

I

Mrs. Walton-Evans was standing in the hall when Eve wearily let herself in. The first thing Eve saw was that small accusing figure—colourless, quite, with ashen hair, an ill-chosen frock of unrelieved grey, a narrow black velvet ribbon about the throat. That ribbon was a source of irritation to Eve, who called it "Victorian," but Mrs. Walton-Evans considered herself undressed without it.

"Hello, Mummy," said Eve, blinking at the unaccustomed light in the hall after the long drive through the dark from the station.

"Where have you been?" were Mrs. Walton-Evans' first words. "You come home at twenty minutes to ten, after promising to be back for dinner. Really, Eve, I think this is the limit. I call it thoroughly unkind of you to behave like this, to say nothing about being exceedingly bad manners. I can't imagine what Dr. Graham must think of my daughter."

Eve had been taking off her coat and gloves during this avalanche of reproach, her lips pressed together in a stubborn line that made her mother's heart sink. Mrs. Walton-Evans knew that expression only too well. Eve now raised her head and said:

"I don't care a damn what he thinks. Oh, sorry," she added hastily, as she saw Mrs. Walton-Evans bridle. "But I'm tired out."

"I daresay you are," said her mother. "But what have you been doing? What excuse have you to offer?"

"None," said Eve, taking a comb from her bag and running it through her untidy hair.

"None! Eve, I think this sort of conduct is quite intolerable. You promised to be back and——"

"You've said all that, Mummy," interrupted Eve, in the same weary voice. "I admit I've been rather beastly not to come back, and I'm sorry. But I've no excuse to offer. I just wanted to stay in town, and I did."

"In spite of the fact that you knew this doctor, who is a stranger to us, was coming to dine—and that it was a little shooting-dinner in honour of October 1st. I think you're a most selfish girl, Eve, and your father thinks the same. He's most annoyed about it."

Eve's conscience smote her. She was sorrier for annoying her genial and easy-going father than this peevish mother who perpetually complained about things.

"I've said I'm sorry, Mummy, and I am," she exclaimed with an exasperated sigh. "I'd better go straight up to my room and not face the enraged crowd. Why there should be so much fuss about me missing dinner, I don't know. I'm quite sure this Dr. Graham hadn't any more wish to meet me than I had to meet him."

"How can you be so silly?" said her mother. "Of course he wanted to meet you. And Dr. Coleman was most disappointed you failed to turn up."

"Oh, Reggie will get over it," said Eve, with a short laugh. "Anyhow, make my apologies. I'm going up to bed."

"Nothing of the kind, Eve. The least you can do is to come in with us now, and be as nice as you can to Dr. Graham."

"I couldn't stand Reggie being facetious."

"Reggie has gone home. He was called away soon after dinner to a baby-case, poor man."

"Oh, Lord!" said Eve.

Mrs. Walton-Evans stared at her. Nobody knew how her daughter tried her patience. It was ridiculous, the girl saying she had no excuses to offer.

"Where have you been all this time?" she asked.

"With a crowd," said Eve. "Bobby and Poppy and a Miss Marsuen and some others."

"The whole afternoon and evening?"

"Yes," said Eve, turning from her mother's suspicious and inquisitive stare.

Mrs. Walton-Evans bit her lip. Vaguely she suspected some man in this. One never knew, when Eve was going about with that horrible, fast Crawford girl . . . that terrible Bobby Richards. Was there some man in it? Was Eve having a secret affair? Mrs. Walton-Evans leapt to all kinds of conclusions, each more appalling than the last. However, she did not want to sting her daughter to temper, and let her rush off to bed. She particularly wished her to make the acquaintance of this very nice young man, Dr. Graham, whom Reggie Coleman had brought to dinner. So she stifled her impulse to cross-question Eve, and said weakly:

"Oh, well, there it is; you don't try to be nice and do what I want, and I suppose you never will. I don't feel I've got a daughter at all. However—come along, Eve—at least you can try and make up for your rudeness to Dr. Graham by being nice to him now. Come along—quickly."

With the utmost reluctance Eve followed her mother into the drawing-room. She was sick with despair about Hammond. She hated her home, her parents—everything. It was Lawrence . . . Lawrence . . . nobody, nothing but Lawrence. And he didn't want her, didn't care. . . .

Her father, comfortably seated in a big arm-chair, his feet stretched to the fire, a cigar in his mouth, looked up at Eve as she entered.

"So you're back, you young monkey," he said.

"Yes. I'm frightfully sorry I'm so late, Daddy," she said. "I know I promised to come back, but I was kept. I simply couldn't get away from that crowd I was in."

Mrs. Walton-Evans seated herself on the sofa, and gave her daughter a bitter look.

"You might have turned up before this, kiddie-winks. It's twenty to ten. And here's Dr. Graham been hearing all about you from Coleman and myself—giving you quite a good reputation, too—and you let us all down."

Eve smiled a little wanly.

"I *am* sorry," she said. "I honestly couldn't get away. I do hope Dr. Graham will forgive me——" She turned now to a tall, thin young man, who had risen from his chair when

she entered, and was gravely watching her. "How do you do," she added, holding out her hand. And she smiled a little more brightly when she met his gaze. He was rather a good-looking young man, and the eternal feminine in Eve was instantly ready for fresh conquest, although she was not definitely conscious of it, and quite sure her heart had been permanently put out of action by Hammond.

"How do you do," Dr. Graham said, shaking hands with her. "And please don't apologise to me, Miss Walton-Evans. I know what town is—one dashes about and gets very hung up."

"One does indeed," said Eve; and then sat down feeling in a better humour. "Oh, I'm tired," she added, "and dying for a cigarette."

"Have one of mine," said Graham, holding out his case.

She took one, and he lit it for her. She thought he had rather nice manners and a very pleasant cultured voice. Graham returned to his seat and she gave him a quick, critical glance. He was a little too tall, ungainly in his movements; she had noticed the awkwardness with which he had lit her cigarette. But she had also noticed the hand that held the match—and hands were very important to Eve. It was a nice hand—broad, with long thin fingers, rather big knuckles, and blunt tips, the nails oblong and closely pared. It looked a strong, capable hand.

The hands were typical of the man; he looked altogether a strong, capable person. She did not like the cut of his dinner-jacket. Rather untidy. Yes. He had fair, very fair, hair which seemed to spring crisply upward from the roots; rather too much a bunch of it in front. But he had good features; a straight sensitive nose, a charming mouth, suggesting a sweet temper, and a pair of very blue eyes—mild, rather grave eyes. They were fringed with long fair lashes which gave him a delicate boyish look, and he had a long chin, which flawed a face which otherwise would have been very regular and handsome. The general effect, however, was a very agreeable one, and Eve mentally put Dr. Graham down as a "good-looking man."

Mr. Walton-Evans launched into an animated account of the day, and appeared to like Dr. Graham very well.

"Topping morning, wasn't it, Graham?" he said, puffing luxuriously at his cigar.

"First-rate, sir," said the young doctor. "I enjoyed it enormously. Best day's shooting I've had for years."

"It didn't rain down here, then?" said Eve.

"Poured for half-an-hour after lunch, but it cleared up after a bit," said her father. "We had a partridge drive in the morning. Hayling and the beaters drove the birds over the brow of that hill by the Spinney, Eve. We got six brace. Graham shot well, I tell you. That left and right of his was a corker."

"Oh, no," said Graham modestly.

"It was," said Giles heartily. "Then in the afternoon we went round the hedges and over that field of roots near Orridge's farm, and down to Rat's Ramble, and got ten brace of pheasants and a couple of hares."

"It sounds a good day," said Eve. "Did Reggie do well?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Walton-Evans generously. But his private opinion of Dr. Coleman as a sportsman was a poor one. Coleman was one of the enthusiastic and greedy shots. Good-natured and keen enough, but not brought up to it. Now, anyone could see that Graham had received a sound education with his gun. This afternoon he had seen that the leaf was not all off and that the birds were flying too low. He had let them sail over without taking a shot. But that left and right during the partridge drive . . . very pretty . . . young Graham was a lad after Giles' own heart.

Dr. Graham looked at Eve.

"Do you shoot?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I usually walk round with the guns, but I don't shoot. I don't think I'd like to somehow. It worries me sometimes even to watch other people bring down those lovely birds."

"Yes. It does seem a shame," admitted Graham. "The cock-pheasant is a gorgeous creature."

"Are you down in Haywards Heath for long?" asked Eve.

"I'm not sure yet. Coleman's very kindly asked me to put up with him for as long as I like. I'm looking out for a practice in Sussex."

"Oh, are you?" said Eve. "Perhaps we shall hail you as our new practitioner, shall we?"

She smiled at him, the cigarette-smoke curling from her red lips. He thought, suddenly, how pretty she was. Coleman had said she was a very attractive girl. In fact, he had raved about her sufficiently to make Michael Graham quite sure he would not like her. He never did like people if he heard their praises sounded too superlatively before he met them. He had expected to find a rather disdainful and too modern young woman. . . . He was agreeably surprised to discover this quite natural and very charming girl, with her brown shingled head and beautiful pale skin and very expressive eyes. A pity she put so much stuff on her lips. They were a perfect shape, and he was sure the red nature had given them was sufficient. Weird, inconsistent creatures, women. Here was a girl who was obviously sporting; knew all about a day's shooting, looked healthy enough, as though she took plenty of exercise. Yet she rouged her lips to a brilliant vermilion, and he thought that blue silk dress much too short; she sat with legs crossed, showing both rounded knees. Pretty knees, certainly. Any man would admire them. But Michael Graham had rather old-fashioned ideas about women. He was not a prig, but he liked reserves. The girl of to-day seemed to have none.

However, women did not come into Michael's scheme of things at the moment—except as patients. His female patients were, to him, machines, to be treated as such. Women, socially, were a necessary evil, but he found them almost embarrassing. One very brief and innocent affair with a good-looking cousin had brought him into slight contact with the psychology of women, but had ended almost as soon as it had begun. A few shy embraces, and the girl had pronounced him both dull and awkward, and had married a young officer in the Black Watch. Michael nursed a few injured feelings for a week, then returned to hospital and decided to forswear women in favour of work, which, on the whole, he found less tiresome and more in his line.

Eve had a charming friendly way with men, however, which put them at their ease, and Michael Graham found himself talking to her without effort. With one of her swift changes of mood, she had decided to make herself agreeable to this young doctor. She was hurt, sore from

the humiliation she had received from Hammond's hands. She knew she was pretty and that men found a certain irresistible appeal in her. Very well, she would show what she could do with Dr. Graham. It was more pique than anything.

Her colour rose. Her eyes sparkled as she chatted gaily to the young doctor on a dozen different topics. She looked as though she glowed with some inward fire.

Graham was bewildered. He could not take his gaze from her. He answered her in monosyllables, and was content to listen to the light ripple of her conversation. Reggie Coleman was right, he thought—when Eve gave him time to think—this girl was intelligent beyond her years. Her *savoir-faire* was amazing. Her intelligence was, perhaps, superficial. She had a capacity for skimming over the surface of things, and avoided probing too deeply into any subject. Therein lay her wisdom, thought Michael.

At the same time, whilst the man was amused, the doctor also was interested. His professional eye saw behind the mask. He was quite sure that something was worrying this child under the brilliant gaiety. She was too excitable, too flushed, too highly-strung. A bundle of nerves. Michael was not a very far-seeing man. He rarely delved into the psychology of things. He just calmly met and dealt with situations when they arose. He did not immediately jump to the conclusion that Eve was suffering from reaction; neither did he suspect that she had been getting into mischief up in London. But he did observe that she was too nervy and excited, and he wondered what nourishment or rest she had taken to-day. Her eyes were under-shadowed. She looked over-tired.

The Walton-Evans noticed nothing except that Eve was being unusually bright and amusing. Mrs. Walton-Evans was satisfied that Eve was doing her level best to entertain Dr. Graham and make up for her absence at dinner.

"Go and play to us, kiddie, if you aren't too weary," Mr. Walton-Evans suggested. "One of your little French songs, eh?"

"Right-oh, Daddy," she said. "I'll warble to you. If that doesn't send Dr. Graham straight home,

nothing will. I call it a method of getting rid of one's guests."

"Oh, I say—no!" Michael protested. "I'd very much like to hear you sing."

"Be it on your own head," she said, giving him a swift smile.

He watched her gravely while she seated herself on the piano-stool and turned over some songs which lay on the top of the piano. How pretty she was, he thought. The electric standard-lamp beside the piano threw up gold lights in her brown head. The whole personality of the girl puzzled Michael. Frankly, he did not know what to make of her. He only knew, man-like, that he found her a very attractive young woman and that he liked her. He could not help liking her.

Giles Walton-Evans poured out a whisky-and-soda and handed it to the young doctor. He took it, but set it down on the table beside him, untasted. Eve was playing . . . singing. She had no great technique, but her touch was sympathetic and her voice a small sweet mezzo. Michael Graham knew nothing about music. As a rule it bored him. But he found that he liked this kind of music. Eve sang charmingly . . . and knew how to make an effect. Michael listened to the words—French—only just comprehensible to him. He supposed Eve knew the language thoroughly. Her accent seemed good.

*"Bergère, légère,
Je crains tes appas.
Ton âme s'en flamme,
Mais tu n'aime pas!"*

Eve sang the last line with a thrill of pain in her voice that surprised Michael. "*Tu n'aime pas!*" . . . Was this child in love? Who was the man who did not love her?

And Eve, at the piano, throwing herself feverishly into her song, thought:

"Tu n'aime pas . . . oh, Lawrence . . . Lawrence! . . ."

She finished the song abruptly. . . . Started another—English this time. She sang several sentimental songs with admirable skill and definite musical ability. Then her mood changed. She began to play jazz—without any

music. She looked over her shoulder at Michael Graham. His very blue eyes were watching her. She bit her lips and laughed at him.

"Do you hate jazz?"

"No—I like it. Do go on," he said.

"I took one look at you" [sang Eve],
'Twas all I meant to do,
And then my heart stood still!"

She looked away from him. And she thought of the dance in Toffee's studio . . . how she had sung that song . . . dancing in Hammond's arms. Desperate misery seized her. She stopped singing . . . began to play a difficult piece of César Franck's—a wild, passionate thing which she could only skim over. But she achieved an emotional effect.

Michael Graham stared at the ground. This girl baffled him. Something was wrong with her . . . something was worrying her. What was it? The doctor recognised all the signs of hysteria in her manner. He was not in the least surprised when Eve suddenly swung round on the stool, clapped a hand to her head and said:

"Oh . . . the room's going round . . . Mummy . . ."

Michael sprang to his feet. He reached Eve just as she swayed, and put his arms about her. She fell against him limply, her face chalk-white. Mrs. Walton-Evans screamed, and rushed up.

"Eve—oh, dear, Eve—what is it?"

"Hello, what's the matter?" said Giles, putting down glass and cigar and joining the little group.

Michael supported Eve. He knew she had not fainted dead away; that she was only on the verge of fainting. He made her put her head down on her knees.

"All right. You're quite all right," he said calmly. "Don't move. Just keep your head down a moment."

He turned round to the anxious and startled parents.

"She's all right. Only dizzy," he said. "Perhaps the heat of this room, or too long a day in town. Over-tired."

"I wonder if the child had any dinner," said Mr. Walton-Evans anxiously.

Eve gave a little moan and sat up. She was still

leaning against Michael Graham, her eyes shut. She heard his deep, quiet voice.

"All right now, Miss Walton-Evans?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Eve—my *dear* child!" said her mother. "Whatever happened?"

Eve looked at her blankly.

"I don't know. Just . . . felt faint."

"Did you have any dinner, young lady?" demanded Mr. Walton-Evans.

"N-no," she confessed.

"Proper lunch—proper tea?" added her father.

"N-not much," she said.

"H'm," he said, pursing his lips. "That's the way you women shop in town. Damn silly, I call it."

"You really ought to take more care of yourself, dear," from Mrs. Walton-Evans, back to the grieving tone.

Eve looked up at Michael. He was the only one who kept quiet, who was not harrying her. She felt suddenly grateful for his presence. There was something strong and reliable about this young man. He looked down at her. He felt very sorry for her. She was very soft and sweet to hold. The fragrance from her hair reached his nostrils. The professional sense went. The man was suddenly thrilled.

"You're all right now," he said awkwardly. "Shall I—can I—help you up to your room?"

Eve moved away from his supporting arm. She put a hand to her head. It was still going round.

"I—feel so—funny," she muttered.

Michael looked at his host.

"If you don't mind, sir, I'll help her up to her room. Could she have a little hot milk and brandy? That'll buck her up as quickly as anything."

"I'll order it at once," said Mrs. Walton-Evans.

Eve shut her eyes and leaned against Michael again. She felt sick, powerless to move. Two great tears welled into her eyes. She swallowed hard.

"I—feel—so rotten," she said.

Michael saw the tears, and his heart gave the queerest jerk. He suddenly picked her right up in his arms.

"You're a light weight," he said. "I'll carry you."

He carried her slowly up to her bedroom. Only half-conscious, Eve lay against him, her eyes shut, the tears trickling down her cheeks.

She was only too thankful that Dr. Graham was here. She felt she could not have borne fussing from Mummy or Daddy.

Michael laid her on her bed. He fingered her pulse. Lying there, her ruffled brown head on the pillow, her cheeks tear-stained, she looked extraordinarily young and pathetic, he thought, and smiled down at her.

"Better?" he said.

"Yes, thank you, Dr. Graham," she said. Then she added: "I'm so sorry—to behave like that."

"Why didn't you have proper food and rest? It's so hard on your constitution," he said gravely.

The thought of Hammond flashed into her mind, and hurt abominably. She turned her face to the pillow.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm silly," she said.

Michael said:

"Coleman's your doctor, isn't he?"

"Yes, but I don't want one," she said. "I'll be quite all right in the morning. It's only sheer nerves."

"It shouldn't be," said Michael, "at your age."

She turned round to him, and he was astonished to see the bitterness on her white young face.

"I'm not such a baby," she began. Then she buried her face in the pillow again. "Oh, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters."

Then Michael Graham saw how very young she was. He also guessed that something had bitten her rather hard—and he supposed there was a man in the case. He also felt a most extraordinary desire to help her and be nice to her. The very desire made him shy and embarrassed. He no longer felt a doctor in the bedroom of a patient. He was a man in the bedroom of a girl who interested and attracted him strongly. And he felt that he ought not to remain here.

"You'll be all right now," he said. "I think I hear someone coming along with your drink. You'll take it all, won't you?"

"Yes," she said.

"Then I'll say good night."

Eve turned round and put out a hand.

"Thanks awfully, Dr. Graham," she said. "You have been kind."

"Oh, rot," he said boyishly. He took her hand and held it for a fleeting second. "I hope I shall see you again."

"I hope so, too," she said forlornly.

He walked out of the room, hands in his trouser pockets, his brain full of her. After he had gone, Eve forgot all about him for a long time.

2

By the end of October Eve had gone a long way toward forgetting Lawrence Hammond. The first sharp pain of her failure to make him care for her quickly grew dull. Then it disappeared altogether.

When Eve met Poppy Crawford in Haywards Heath early in November, and heard that Lawrence had gone back to Malma, she scarcely endured one pang. She only felt pleasantly regretful.

"You were very keen, weren't you, my dear?" inquired Poppy. "Bobby said he thought you were rather thick, you two, up in Toffee's studio."

Eve flushed and looked away from Poppy's inquisitive eyes.

"Not particularly," she said.

"But you *were* keen," persisted Poppy.

"I was, in a way," said Eve. "So was Lawrence. But it wasn't serious."

Her heart gave rather a guilty throb when she made that statement. But she was not going to give Poppy any insight into her disastrous affair with Hammond. Four weeks was a long time. She had not seen or heard from Lawrence since their last evening together. She had even begun to laugh at herself. He had said she would "howl with laughter." She had denied it; believed herself desperately and hopelessly in love. But she could not help laughing now. What a little fool she had been. If only she could see Lawrence Hammond again now and show him how completely he had ceased to interest her!

"Oh, my dear, I've heard that this friend of Dr. Coleman's is always at your house," said Poppy, ready for fresh scandal. "Is he nice? What's his name—Graham—is he intriguing?"

"Oh, Michael Graham," said Eve. "Yes. He's awfully charming. He does come a good bit. Daddy loves him because he shoots so well, and Mummy likes him because he's the perfect gent. and gives her a little attention."

"Ah ha!" said Poppy. "Beware. When a man pays attention to one's mamma, it means he's seriously considering matrimony."

"You are silly, Poppy," said Eve.

"No, really—are you intrigued?" said Poppy, her face impish.

"I like him very much," said Eve. "He's awfully nice to me."

And that was the end of the conversation with Poppy. But as Eve drove home in the Humber she thought rather a lot about Dr. Graham.

During this last four weeks she had seen much of him. He had come twice a week for shooting. He had also taken her out for several drives in his car, which she liked—a Darracq with a Weyman saloon body. He let her drive it, which amused her.

She was not definitely attracted by Michael Graham. But he had come into her life at the right moment and she was badly in need of an interest to take her mind from Hammond. Michael supplied that interest. He also won her admiration and confidence. Four weeks of friendship proved him a very stable and dependable person, in whom any girl might put her trust. He was, moreover, the nicest man she had ever met. And he was so enthusiastic about his work, so keen to do something worth doing, that he could not fail to make her admire and respect him.

He became necessary to Eve. A solid rock of comfort and assurance. She could rely on his sympathy and friendship when she wanted it. Eve mentally classed him as "a perfect dear," and she began to hope he would not find a practice and fade away from Haywards Heath too quickly. Yesterday he had taken her into Brighton to

the Regent, to see a big war-film, and afterwards had given her tea at the Metropole. She was charming to Michael, and he put himself out to be pleasant to her. She was quite sure he liked her very much indeed. She wished he would dress more carefully ; also that he would be a little more open with his admiration.

" He can't say pretty things," Eve decided. " He can't let himself go. But if he did—he'd be *most* intriguing."

Meanwhile, he was a new and interesting friend, and Eve unconsciously allowed herself to slide more deeply into their friendship every day without worrying as to the inevitable end of it.

If she thought at all about the sex side of the affair, it was with sheer curiosity. What would Michael Graham be like as a lover? What would he do if he ever let himself go? She was sure he had never had any serious affairs. He had more or less told her so in the course of conversation. The greatest love of his life, at the moment, was his sister Anne. Eve was keen to meet her. She appeared to be a perfect paragon in Michael's eyes ; his only living relative. She was two years older than he was. They had been inseparable up in Edinburgh until the death of their mother, five years ago. Then she had met and married a man in the Army—Captain Humphrey Flaming. For the last three years Anne had been in India with her husband. They had only just come home, and were at present stationed at Aldershot. But Michael expected his sister and brother-in-law in Brighton to-morrow. Anne had a small girl of three who needed sea air after India. Humphrey had leave, and Michael had taken a small furnished flat for them in Brunswick Square, Hove. It had amused and pleased Eve to help him find it.

" I'm longing to meet this Anne of yours," she had said yesterday, on the way back to Haywards Heath from their little jaunt. And Michael had said, in his quiet, grave way :

" I'm sure you'll like her and she'll like you."

" Not if she's as perfect as you say," Eve had laughed. " I'm so far from perfect."

" Nonsense," he had said. " You're quite different, anyhow. Anne is a woman of thirty, and you are—what ? "

" Twenty next Sunday," she had said proudly.

" A child," Michael had reminded her. " An infant in

the eyes of the law. Anne's the most understanding soul in the world. She'd get on with anybody."

Eve thought about Michael and his sister now, as she drove her father's Humber along the Cuckfield Road back to her home. Funny old Michael. Such a dear! She thought of to-morrow, Thursday. She was going with Michael into Brighton to put some flowers in the flat for the Flamings; make it cheerful for their arrival. She had even gone to the trouble to secure a daily maid for Anne. Eve was happy doing things for people. She was genuinely pleased to give her services to the unknown Anne.

When Eve reached home, she saw Michael's Darracq standing outside the house. She knew it so well by now. Blue, with scarlet wheels and under-wings. Very smart. She let herself into the house with various parcels and books, walked into the drawing-room, and found Dr. Graham there alone.

"Are the Poor Parents out?" she said.

"They seem to be, but your maid said you'd be in for tea," said Michael. "May I stay? I've got such a lot to tell you."

"Oh, what?" said Eve, taking off hat and coat and running the inevitable comb through her shingled head.

"I've bought a practice," he said.

"Have you, Michael?" They were Eve and Michael to each other now. "Oh, do tell me about it. Sit down. Let's ring for tea and yap in peace. I rather believe the Poor Parents have gone into Brighton. Daddy wanted some cartridges, and he's gone with old Topwright, who shoots with him, and Mummy is out at bridge with the Thompsons."

She seated herself on a hassock, and lifted a face, glowing from the cold wind, to Michael.

"Do tell me all about the practice," she said. "And don't say it's a thousand miles from Haywards Heath or I shall scream with rage."

Michael handed her his cigarette-case.

"That's awfully sweet of you, Eve," he said. "Would you mind a bit if I departed?"

"Of course," she said. "I've loved having you in the district. You've been awfully nice to me."

"You've been awfully nice to me," he returned. "I can't tell you how I've enjoyed these last three weeks. I don't as a rule rush round with girls——" He laughed and coloured. Michael had that very sensitive, fair skin which flushes easily. "But you do make a fellow such a topping companion."

Eve bowed.

"Thanks," she said. "Thanks, heaps."

It was the first open compliment Michael had ever paid, and she was extraordinarily pleased with it.

He sat down in an arm-chair close to her. She smoked and listened while he talked to her.

The practice he had purchased was in Sussex—only seventeen or eighteen miles from here; a village called Ashingdon. Eve had not heard of it. Michael said it was four miles from Lewes; a small place with a few shops but a fairly big population. The present local doctor raked in patients from the outlying farms and cottages. His name was Oliver. He was old and retiring. The practice was worth £1,200 a year. Michael had driven over to Ashingdon this morning and settled things.

"In such a hurry!" exclaimed Eve.

"Not too much of a hurry," said Michael. "I knew it was just what I wanted. You pay a year and a half's purchase cost, you know, Eve. It's costing me £1,800. Just about what I can afford. And I want to start like that in a small way, then later on, if I can save, I should like to get to town and be a children's specialist."

Eve nodded. Michael Graham had an exceeding love of children and babies. He had a genius for dealing with them. He had worked in the Children's Hospital in Edinburgh as house-surgeon for six months after he had qualified. His ambition was to end up as a children's physician in London.

"Of course, it means hard work in Ashingdon, and perhaps rather dull work, although all medical work is interesting," he told her. "And Oliver has a most attractive seventeenth century cottage and garden which I'm to take on after him."

"It sounds lovely," said Eve. "I'm frightfully glad you're so near us. It'll be nothing to motor over to you, or for you to come to us."

"No. I'm glad about that," he said.

He was much more glad than he could express. Women had not come into his scheme of things until he had met this girl, a month ago. Now she occupied a disturbing amount of his thoughts. He was falling in love with her, most certainly. But he did not want to marry yet. All the same, he felt unable to concentrate on his work quite so entirely as he had been able to do in the past. There was always the urge in him to come and see Eve—Eve who was a complex, beautiful, adorable child-woman with faults to which he was by no means blind, and virtues which he warmly applauded.

He had definitely connected her in his mind with thoughts of matrimony. He had allowed himself to wonder once or twice if she could ever get to like him enough to marry him, or if the interest which she showed in him was merely kindly and platonic. He was rather afraid that the latter was the case.

She was charming, and ready to listen to his news this afternoon while they had tea together. So he told her a lot about his training up in Edinburgh, and his earlier life, which he had not discussed before.

Eve gathered that old Graham, a rather well-known doctor in London, had died when Michael was four and Anne six. Their mother, a Scotswoman, had taken them up to Edinburgh, and they had been educated there. Mrs. Graham had died, leaving Anne £100 a year and Michael £200. He also inherited £5,000, which old Dr. Graham had put in trust for his son's medical training and career. He had wished the boy to follow in his footsteps. Michael had been only too ready to do so. He had qualified at Edinburgh after five and a half years. The last two years he had taken various appointments in hospitals in Edinburgh, but he wished to practise in England. That was why he had come down south.

"I think I shall give up Reggie and come to Ashingdon to be physicked," said Eve, with a touch of coquetry.

Michael leaned forward and extinguished his cigarette-end in the ash-tray which Eve handed him. Her remark pleased and flattered him.

"That's very nice of you," he said.

"But then, you're not interested in people as old as I

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am," she said, with a wicked sparkle in her eyes. "You like babies."

"You're only a baby," he said.

"Oh, am I!" exclaimed Eve. "Then for that you shan't be asked to my birthday dinner on Sunday."

"Was I going to be?"

"Yes."

"Please let me come," he said.

"All right, you shall," she laughed.

He got up, suddenly, as though her near presence, her sparkling eyes, disconcerted him. Hands in his pockets, he began to walk up and down the drawing-room, thick fair eyebrows drawn together thoughtfully.

"I'm damned pleased about this practice at Ashingdon," he said. "If I work hard enough and long enough I may get up to town yet."

"And deal with your beloved babies?"

"Yes. You've no idea how attractive kids are, Eve, or what a lovely person a tiny baby is."

"I'm afraid I don't like infants much," said Eve frankly. "But then, I've never had anything to do with kids. I'm sure I'd like one of my own one day."

"Would you?" he said, with a quick look at her, then looked away again as quickly. "So would I. I think children are most entertaining. From a medical point of view they're a great worry, because the very young ones can't tell you how they feel or where the pain is. You've got to find out. But therein lies the attraction."

"It's rather nice of you to like children so much, Michael," she said. "You don't meet many young men who do."

"Nor many girls," he said. "I think the modern young woman is bored with the thought of a baby."

"H'm," said Eve.

Michael changed the conversation.

"You must come over to Ashingdon and see my new house" he said. "It's called 'Pear-Tree Cottage.'"

"When will you take up the practice?"

"In January. Old Oliver is seedy, and he wants to get away by February."

"And who'll look after you, Michael?"

"Oh, I'll find a cook-housekeeper."

"I thought doctors always needed wives. Can't I find you a nice wife?" she asked, coquetting again.

"No, thanks," he said, a trifle shortly.

Then Eve's mother and father arrived, and the conversation became general.

After Michael Graham had gone, Eve pondered over their talk. Michael was a funny old thing. Difficult to gauge what was going on in that mind of his. His blue eyes looked so keenly out upon life and people and things, and she knew that he had real ambition, an absorbing love of children patients. But he found it very difficult to express himself. Really, she had not the least idea how much he liked her, personally. For the first time she began to think of him in connection with marriage. Michael was a great dear, and any girl who married him might consider herself fortunate. She thought about his practice in Ashington. Pear-Tree Cottage. It sounded rather adorable.

"I wonder if I'd like to marry him," she suddenly asked herself. "And if he'd like to marry me."

It was attractive to reflect upon. Just the germ of sex-feeling for the young doctor developed, that afternoon, in Eve's mind. It did not grow very fast, but it was there. For the first time since her unfortunate and stormy affair with Lawrence, she allowed herself to dwell on the idea of love . . . in connection with Michael. He would make a charming husband, steady, practical, sweet-tempered and tolerant.

Eve let her thoughts wander somewhat. But she felt quite cool and calm about it all. There was no great flaming passion in the thing so far. It was too early for that. But it was apparent to her, during one of her moments of ruthless introspection, that her love for Hammond had been a stupid infatuation. Also that she was now on the road to another love for quite a different kind of man. Ever since Hammond had passed out of her life she had been seeking for love, unconsciously, perhaps. All women seek for love. Some admit it; others deny it. Eve was one of those who are frank with themselves. She clung to that germ of feeling for Michael Graham, created by the news of his next practice, and fostered it.

Eve and Michael drove into Brighton the following morning to complete preparations for the sister who was arriving from Aldershot at midday in her Morris Cowley.

Eve threw herself into the task of making the small furnished flat attractive for Michael's beloved Anne. She bought flowers beyond those that Michael purchased. She lit fires. She aired linen. She talked gravely and quite intelligently on the subject of food to the daily maid, who had the face of a suet-pudding, as Eve announced to Michael, and the mind of one.

They were in the sitting-room—a small but quite agreeably furnished room facing Brunswick Square Gardens. Michael sat on the arm of a chair, smoking a pipe. He had been watching Eve arrange flowers. She had taken off her hat and coat. She looked very pretty. Michael also reflected upon the fact that she was very capable; not merely ornamental, like many girls of her type.

"She's ripping—and to do all this for my sister, who she doesn't even know! It is kind," he thought.

Inevitably his mind leaped to Pear-Tree Cottage, and he wondered if this charming girl would help him arrange his home when the time came.

Then he heard a car drive down the square; looked out and recognised his sister's shabby Morris.

"There they are," he said, taking his pipe from his mouth.

"Oh, good," said Eve. She was quite excited to meet Anne Flaming; she had a natural, agreeable desire to witness Anne's pleasure when she saw how beautifully everything had been arranged. She wanted Michael's Anne to like her.

When Anne Flaming walked into the furnished flat which was to house her for several weeks, she saw, first of all, the figure of her brother—dear, dependable Michael, whom she loved dearly—and she walked straight to his arms.

"Hello, Mike, bless you," she said.

Then, as she kissed him, she noticed the very pretty brown-haired girl, whose green-hazel eyes were sparkling with good humour and friendliness, and she said:

"Is this Eve, whom I've heard so much about?"

"Yes, this is Eve," said Michael. "I can't tell you how topping she's been, getting this show ready for you, Anne."

Anne Flaming walked up to Eve and held out a hand.

"This is most awfully nice of you," she said. "You've been a brick, Eve—may I call you Eve? Mike's written so often about you."

"Of course, call me Eve," said the younger girl. "And I've heard a lot about you, Mrs. Flaming."

"Anne, please," said Michael's sister. And as they shook hands, Eve felt a sudden warm enthusiasm for Anne. One smile, one grip of the hand from her, one word of gratitude was enough for Eve. She knew she would love Anne Flaming. And how different she was, in appearance, from her brother. Michael was so big and fair and untidy. Anne Flaming was a small, neat little woman, and she was as dark as Michael was fair. She had smooth, black hair—close-cropped, inclined to wave—very small, exquisite ears in which she wore small real pearls, a thin, oval face, brown from the Indian sun, and quite the loveliest eyes Eve had ever seen. They were large dark-brown eyes, full of tenderness and sympathy. One had only to look into Anne Flaming's eyes to know that she was that rare thing, a compassionate human being—compassionate for all people, all things.

Anne was tired after the long drive from Aldershot. They had had a puncture at Horsham, she told Michael and Eve, and the little girl, Paddy, had added to the discomfort of her parents by being violently sick.

"You'll really have to find a cure for her, Mike," Anne told her brother, with a humorous smile. "Paddy's frightful in a car. She's always sick. Humphrey's carrying her up. She refused to come with me."

"My small niece has a will of her own, Eve," observed Michael.

Anne took off her hat and looked round the room. All that was ugly or depressing was hidden by flowers; gold and brown and scarlet chrysanthemums, most extravagant-looking pink carnations, dahlias of many colours. Anne's dark eyes grew suddenly misty.

"How sweet of you both," she said, turning round to Michael and Eve. "It looks lovely."

"I hope the maid will be all right," said Michael. "Eve secured her."

"I'm sure she'll be all right," said Anne. "You've been wonderful, my dear," she said, with a grateful look at Eve. "I can't thank you enough."

"I don't want to be thanked," said Eve, feeling proud of herself. "I hope everything will be all right. I'll get along home now."

"Certainly not," said Anne. "We can't have you running away like that. You must see my offspring, and meet Humphrey."

Captain Humphrey Flaming came in, carrying a small figure in a blue coat with naval buttons and a scarlet tam-o'-shanter. The figure squirmed and howled.

"Here's the hope of the Flaming family," announced Humphrey. "Doing the Charleston in mid-air."

Eve was afraid the child was crying. However, when Miss Paddy Flaming, aged three, was set on her feet she produced a small, flushed face creased with laughter. The howls were giggles. She eyed Eve dubiously, then pounced on Michael.

"It's my n'Uncle Mike."

"Young monkey," said Michael, swinging her up into his arms.

"Humphrey, this is Eve—Miss Walton-Evans—I don't really know why we should address her as Eve in this fashion, but we've heard so much about her from Mike, haven't we? And she has been so kind—helping Mike get the flat ready for us."

Captain Flaming held out his hand to Eve.

"It's more than kind of you," he said. "How do you do?"

Eve liked the look of Anne's husband. He was not strikingly handsome, but there was something very attractive about him. He had blue eyes that twinkled, a good-tempered mouth with a close-clipped brown moustache, a very high, intelligent forehead, and curly brown hair showing grey threads, and fast growing thin on the top. He looked the picture of health, a rather typical Army man, used to hard riding, a good deal of open-air exercise, cricket, polo, Rugby.

He turned from Eve, and just glanced at Anne's pale,

tired face, then said, in the most matter-of-fact voice:

"I should sit down a bit if I were you, my dear, before you unpack."

"I'm all right, my dear," said Anne. "Mike is being strangled by my daughter. I must get her things off and settle her down."

Paddy, blue-eyed like her father, with a pale blonde head that looked strange next to her mother's dark one, clung to Michael and yelled:

"Wanna stay wiv my n'uncle."

"I'll take her things off, Anne," said Michael. "You sit down and have a cigarette."

"He is adorable with kids," Eve thought. "No wonder he wants to deal with them in his profession. He obviously knows how to treat them."

Then she held out a hand to Anne.

"Look here, I'm not going to stay and spoil the family circle," she said. "But do drive over to see us soon. My parents would simply love to meet you."

"Thanks so much," said Anne. "I shall most certainly come. I have a husband not over fond of leaving his arm-chair once he gets into it—ahem——" she coughed, and glanced sideways at Humphrey. "But I'll try and induce him to come. He's wedded to his hearthside and wireless-set when he's home on leave."

"I daresay after days of hard work on Salisbury Plain and all the rest of it he gets tired," said Eve, with a sympathetic look at Humphrey, who said:

"Quite right, Miss Walton-Evans. Most understanding of you. I'm completely bullied by my wife and daughter."

"You look as though you can stand up to it," laughed Eve. "But do come over to our place one day. I rather fancy we're shooting the big wood next Saturday, and Daddy's out to find a good gun or two. Michael's coming, so if Daddy 'phones you up, do come, and perhaps Anne will come to the lunch, too."

"It sounds awfully attractive, if I can find a suitable nurse for my Paddy meanwhile," said Anne.

"Many thanks," said Humphrey. "I'd like some shooting very much."

"Good-bye for now, then," said Eve. "Good-bye, Michael."

"I'm going to drive you back to Haywards Heath," said Michael.

"No, you're not," said Eve. "You stay and talk to your sister. I can get a perfectly good bus."

"No, no," began Michael.

"No arguments," interrupted Eve gaily.

Michael, with Paddy clinging to him, followed her down to the main entrance of the building, arguing.

Anne and her husband exchanged glances.

"That's a pretty child," said Anne. "Rather charming manner, too. Methinks our Michael is smitten, Humphrey."

"Shouldn't be surprised," said Humphrey, stretching his legs comfortably to the fire.

"I would rather like him to get married," said Anne.

"I always feel dear old Mike wants someone to look after him."

CHAPTER II

I

THE following Saturday remained in Eve's memory for many years as one of the most pleasant days of her whole life. And it was a very eventful and important day, too, for it decided both Michael Graham's future and her own.

To Eve's father the day on which they shot the big wood was always the great day of the year. Mrs. Walton-Evans regarded it with gloom. It meant an enormous lunch to be packed up by cook, and more muddy footsteps in her clean hall than her good temper could endure. It was a day of grievance. But it ended as satisfactorily for her as for everybody else.

The Flamings drove over from Brighton at Mr. Walton-Evans' invitation. And of course Michael came with Dr. Coleman. There were eight guns in all, including Poppy's father, Tom Crawford—very unlike his vivacious daughter, for he was a small, bald-headed, sober little man, but he shot quite well, and that was all that was required of him.

Eve always enjoyed a day's shooting when she set out for one, and to-day she felt particularly happy. Anne Flaming was walking with her. And Michael was there, looking his best in his brown shooting-suit, an old felt hat on his fair head, gun over his shoulder. They walked in line across a field of roots on the way to the big wood. To Eve that was always an exhilarating, pleasing occupation. She liked to see the brown-coated figures of the men, ready, walking in line over the green roots. Eve herself on the extreme left, then Michael, Anne, Mr. Walton-Evans, a labrador at his heels, Reggie Coleman, Humphrey Flaming, and the others.

"Mark . . ." sang out the voice of Mr. Walton-Evans. The whole line stopped. Eve's heart beat faster as a covey of partridges got up fifty yards away, and came back with the wind right down the line, the small dark

bodies swiftly flying targets against the pale November sky.

Bang . . . bang . . . bang. . . . Some of the little dark bodies hurtled through the air to the ground. The labrador at Mr. Walton-Evans' side stood quivering, tense with expectancy, tail wagging furiously, awaiting the word of command. The two spaniel bitches behind Hayling, the keeper, strained at their leashes.

The partridges sailed over the hedge to the left of the guns. The men watched . . . then the labrador was allowed to retrieve . . . ran like a slim black streak over the roots . . . came back, a bird in his mouth . . . retrieved another and another. Two brace. The first spoils of the day. Then the guns moved on.

Later, when they were at their posts in a central clearing in the wood, waiting for the beaters to drive the pheasants over, Eve was alone with Michael. She had dug her sit-stick into the soft earth just behind his stand. He had laid down his gun, and was enjoying a pipe. The beaters were nowhere near just yet. He smiled at the girl.

"It's nice of you to sit with me," he said.

"I want to," she said. She took off her small felt hat and shook back her hair, letting the wind play with it. Her face was warm and flushed. He thought he had never seen her look prettier.

The wood was quiet, save for the rustle of dry fallen leaves in the wind, and now and then the bark of a dog. Very faintly in the distance they could hear the tapping of a beater's stick on the trees . . . the voices of the beaters, scaring the pheasants from their peace and driving them onwards to the clearing.

"I always think this is the most exhilarating moment of the day," whispered Eve.

"Have a cigarette?" said Michael.

"No, I'm happy," she said.

"They're coming nearer," said Michael, putting his pipe in his pocket and picking up his gun.

Ten minutes later the shouting and halloing of the beaters and the crashing of sticks through bush and thicket was very close indeed. Eve watched and waited, breathlessly. Michael was on the alert. Then:

"Mark over . . . mark . . . mark . . . !"

The birds came over thick, and with that soft, unmistakable whirr of wings. The shots cracked out. Eve watched Michael bring down two cocks with a beautiful left and right . . . reload swiftly . . . bring down two more. And now the ground seemed strewn with them . . . blue and green sheen of the plumage bright against the brown earth . . . scarlet thread of blood staining the brown and blue and green.

Eve waited until the drive was over. Then she walked to a spot where a cock lay, still twitching spasmodically, its beady little eyes glazed. Blood ran from its small curved beak. She thought how exquisite the feathers were—ruffle of green and blue, tipped with gold, beautiful russet-brown wings, long slender tail-feathers, chequered brown and yellow. Eve shuddered a little as she remembered the soft thud of its warm, still-breathing body when it hit the ground.

"Cruel, cruel," she whispered, bending over the bird.

The cock-pheasant had ceased to twitch, and lay still. Michael came and picked it up.

"That's a fine bird—I say, Eve, what a marvellous drive. I wonder what the bag is."

"I don't know," sighed Eve.

He smiled at her.

"What's the sigh for?"

"The death of the pheasants. They're so beautiful."

"My dear, it won't do for you to come out shooting and give way to sentiment of that kind," said Michael.

"My besetting fault, Michael. Too much sentiment. Here comes Daddy. Dad—what's the bag?"

Giles Walton-Evans, his genial face rubicund, four birds hanging from his left hand, beamed at her.

"That was a magnificent drive, kiddie. Thirty or forty brace, as far as I can see."

Anne came up, small, neat, charming, in a red suède coat and hat.

"What a drive, Eve!"

"Did you like it, Anne?" Eve took the arm of her new friend. She felt happy and light-hearted this morning. Everybody was nice. The whole world was nice. Her sorrow for the slaughtered pheasant was short-lived. Now she felt her father's pride in the big bag.

"Now," said Mr. Walton-Evans, "Hayling thinks we might have lunch, then go to the other side of the wood for the second drive."

Lunch was a joyous meal. The eight guns and the two girls gathered in the farm-house belonging to Mr. Orridge, from whom Giles rented his shooting. Inside Mrs. Orridge's dining-room, graciously offered to the party for the shooting-lunch, a huge log fire crackled and flamed. Michael brought the basket in from Giles' car, and Eve and Anne set the table. A joint of beef, two loaves, plenty of butter and cheese, a dripping cake, pickles, beer. Excellent meal. Everybody was hungry and pleasantly tired after the long morning, and there was agreeable anticipation of more good sport in the afternoon. Eve sat between Michael and Humphrey Flaming, and wondered why she ever grumbled at life when it held clean, sweet, exhilarating days such as these. But even in an hour like this the eternal feminine in her thrilled to every smile and word from Michael Graham. Every time she looked at his long, kindly face, flushed from exercise, his thick, fair hair ruffled, his near presence exuding the warm, earthy smell of tweed and tobacco, she felt overwhelming tenderness. Then there was more than tenderness—something sharper, more poignant—when accidentally his hand touched hers. It thrilled her enormously.

And suddenly it flashed across Eve that she loved Michael Graham. And it was a clean, proud love which held none of the evil fascination or shame that had entered into her passion for Lawrence Hammond. There was no desire in her to crawl to Michael's feet and starve for a touch, a word. Only the wish to stand beside him as his equal, and know herself loved by him as deeply as she loved. Did he love her? Surely. It was not in Michael Graham to flirt. That swift warm look had not been born of momentary passion.

During the afternoon Eve felt uncontrollably shy of Michael—she, who scarcely knew the meaning of the word. She felt almost afraid to walk beside him, speak to him, in case she should discover that she was mistaken and that he was not in love with her. She could not bear that. So she kept away from him.

But Michael's thoughts were entirely of Eve. He felt

that his work, his career, his ambitions were all secondary to the most important and insistent thing in the world—the love of a woman. He loved this girl, Eve, this enchanting person whose complexities baffled him, but who was obviously necessary to his life's happiness.

He was wretched during that second drive in the wood because Eve was not sitting behind him. He shot badly. He ceased to enjoy the day. But nothing would have induced him to follow her or ask her if she were offended with him.

Mr. Walton-Evans, at the close of day, unconsciously precipitated things.

"I'm going to take four beaters back in the Humber, Eve," he said to his daughter. "Perhaps Graham would be good enough to take you back."

"Certainly, sir," said Michael. He looked at Eve, and his heart gave a great bound. She looked back at him and smiled. Intense happiness and understanding flowed between them then, and all the doubts and depression vanished.

Five minutes later he was driving with Eve along the side of the downs in the direction of Haywards Heath, which was about nine miles from the shooting. Eve sat very still. But her eyes were like stars.

"It grows dark very quickly these afternoons," said Michael.

"Doesn't it?" said Eve, in a matter-of-fact voice. But her hands felt hot, and she clasped them nervously under the rug, and dared not look at him.

They covered four miles. Then Michael thought:

"I can't go on like this." And aloud he said: "D'you mind if I just stop the car a second and light a pipe?"

"Of course not," she said.

He turned into a by-road quite unnecessary for their journey, then pulled the Darracq up to the side of the narrow road. The sun had set. The sky was growing grey and dark, and a faint mist hung over the hawthorn hedges and the brown ploughed fields. Michael did not light his pipe. He looked down at the profile of the girl beside him. She turned and faced him. He could see the shining of her eyes. It rushed across him in that instant that he loved her, that he was in love with her,

and that he must tell her so. With an awkward movement he put an arm around her shoulders.

"Eve," he said.

She could not speak, only moved a little closer to him, her breath coming quickly. So he did love her. He did. Her heart was racing—throbbing.

"Eve . . . I'm frightfully in love with you," he said, like a boy. And his voice was husky, and she could feel his big body trembling against hers. "Do you mind . . . do you mind?" he whispered.

She gave a little, broken laugh, took off her hat, and put her arms about his neck.

"Of course I don't mind. I—love you, Michael," she said.

"Do you?" he said, in an unbelieving voice. "Do you, really?"

"Really," she said.

Then, as he felt her, warm, fragrant, intimate, in his embrace, he knew passion as he had never known it before. All his manhood leapt fiercely in response to the woman in her. She was true woman—and not child. Her young body was quiescent and responsive in his arms. Her mouth was a half-opened flower upturned for his kiss. He drew her very close to him, and body and brain clamoured for her and were hers. This was the greatest thing life had to offer, and nothing else mattered.

"Darling," he said. "Eve, darling, darling . . ."

His lips touched her hair, strayed down her face. He had not known how soft and sweet a girl's face could be to kiss. Then he found her mouth, and ceased to wonder about anything, closed his own eyes during the long wonder of that kiss.

She lay against him, throbbing, mute, passionate. Michael's lips were clean and hard against her mouth. She was exalted and rapturous during that embrace. Yet she could not entirely lose herself. That queer, analytical little brain of hers was thinking . . . wondering . . . remembering. She was utterly happy and at peace in Michael's arms. He supplied a need that had ached in her ever since Lawrence Hammond had taught her the meaning of passion. But with Lawrence the thing had been so entirely physical, and there was so much more than that in

this love she felt for Michael Graham. He was her friend as well as her lover. He would give out as much as she gave; he would not lecture her, laugh at her. He was hers. But Lawrence had never been hers. Therein lay the difference.

They sat there in the car, clinging to each other. Long after Michael raised his lips from her mouth, he sat with his cheek pressed to her cheek, and fierce desire became pure tenderness again—the thrill of certain knowledge that this girl loved him, would be his wife one day, and, one day, if God willed it, the mother of his children.

"Darling," he said. "It's a miracle—you caring for me like this."

"I can't see why you love me," she said, with genuine humility. "I'm not half as nice as you are, Michael, darling."

"Rot," he said. He hugged her closer to his side with his left arm. His other hand found hers and held it captive. "You're the most adorable thing in the world, Eve."

"I'm not. I'm horrid, selfish, vain, hateful!"

"You silly little thing," he said. He turned his face and kissed her on the lips. "You're none of those things. I'm a dull stupid doctor, anyhow."

"You're good, Michael—good and splendid, and any woman would be proud of you," she said.

"Show me the man who wouldn't be proud of you, sweetheart."

Her heart gave a sudden, wretched leap. All her happiness was spoiled by the memory of Lawrence. Why, why had she flung herself into that sordid affair? She had not done anything really bad with Lawrence. But it all assumed evil and large proportions now that she loved Michael and wanted to be her best for him. She was seized with the sudden desire for confession. She hid her face against his shoulder and said:

"Michael . . . perhaps you won't love me when I tell you about . . . something that happened a month ago."

"What happened, darling?" He stroked the silky brown head and kissed it. "Nothing frightful, I'm sure."

"You remember that first night we met . . . when I fainted?"

"Yes," he said, a little uneasily. He had guessed at the

time that Eve was suffering from hysteria . . . that there had been a man in it. "Well, darling?"

"I'd spent that afternoon in London with a man," said Eve, in a muffled voice.

"Why shouldn't you?" said Michael.

"I—I thought I was in love with him."

"Darling, you were perfectly entitled to think yourself in love with any fellow you liked. I don't mind so long as you think you're in love with me, now," Michael said, with a laugh. He hugged her again. "Foolish one, look at me, don't feel badly about it."

"I do, I do," she said, in a tragic voice. "I let him kiss me—several times . . . I wish I hadn't, now I love you."

Michael's eyes grew infinitely tender.

"My darling, I don't care a damn. I can't possibly expect you never to have kissed anyone before."

She looked up quickly. Her eyes were full of tears, her lips quivering.

"You don't mind? You'll forgive me?"

"It wasn't any more serious than that, was it?"

"No," she said. "Of *course* it wasn't."

"Then don't do it again," he said. "Because I shall be fiendishly jealous of you, now. I don't think I'm nearly good enough for you, Eve, but I want you to marry me."

She was crying with sheer happiness, her arms about his neck. She had told him about Lawrence. And he wanted to marry her.

"Eve, sweetheart, don't cry," he said. "Why are you crying?"

"Because I love you, Michael."

"You sweet thing," he said. "Then you will marry me?"

"Yes, of course I will."

"Damn this steering wheel," said Michael, with a broken laugh. "I can't kiss you properly."

Later, driving home along the dark country roads, Michael steering dangerously with one hand on the wheel and the other fast clasped in Eve's small, warm fingers, Eve's cup of happiness seemed to brim over.

"I know Mummy and Daddy will be glad, Michael," she said.

"I doubt if they'll allow you to marry me. You're too young," he smiled at her.

"I'm twenty on Sunday. I know heaps of girls who marry at twenty," she said.

"Anne will be pleased," said Michael suddenly.

"Will she?" said Eve. "I hope so. I love Anne. I can't think of anything nicer than having her for a sister-in-law."

"She likes you, darling," said Michael. "Only, look here, you know I'm not nearly rich enough or settled enough to give you all that you need and——"

"That's quite enough of that," broke in Eve. "I don't ask for anything but your love and Pear-Tree Cottage. Oh, Michael, think of it!"

"It will be simply great, sweetheart," he said. "That is, if your people will let you marry me so quickly. Do you think they'd permit a short engagement—let me take you to Pear-Tree Cottage in the New Year?"

She turned and pressed her lips to his shoulder.

"Michael, I'm so happy, I shall blow up!"

"I shall have to stop the car and kiss you," he said.

It was Michael who announced the news of their engagement to the Walton-Evans. When he walked with Eve into the drawing-room where Mrs. Walton-Evans was patiently listening to an account of the day's shooting from her husband, he said quite simply:

"Eve has promised to marry me. Do you mind?"

Mr. Walton-Evans stared at him, then at Eve's radiant face.

"God bless my soul! Eve and you? Really! Well, now, imagine it! But she's only a child."

"I'm twenty on Sunday," said Eve. "Don't be so ridiculous, Daddy."

Mrs. Walton-Evans was frankly delighted. For the first time for years she felt happy. She had always told Giles she wanted those two to marry. Michael was a dear boy—he would take good care of Eve. She only hoped he would be firm with her. She was so headstrong. It wouldn't do for her to have too much of her own way. She walked up to her daughter and embraced her.

"I'm so glad, dear," she said, "so happy."

"So am I, Mummy," said Eve, and kissed her mother with more warmth than she had felt for years.

The expected remark came from Mrs. Walton-Evans.

"I only wish dear Eric had been alive to know Michael. They would have got on so well together."

Eve pursed her lips. But she was so happy that even the mention of Eric could not irritate her. So she said :

"I wish so too, Mummy."

Mrs. Walton-Evans held out both hands to the young doctor.

"You have heard us speak of darling Eric, my son who died in the war, haven't you?" she said. "You know what a terrible loss it was. You must be my son in future, Michael."

Michael bent and kissed the cheek she offered.

"I'll do my level best to make Eve happy," he said.

"Daddy," said Eve, "say you're pleased."

Giles Walton-Evans looked at Michael. Then he thrust out a hand.

"So I am—so I am," he said heartily. "God bless you both. And thank the Lord Eve has chosen a young man who can shoot."

Then they all laughed, and Michael was told to go home, change his clothes, and come back for dinner.

"We must celebrate the engagement," said Eve's father. "I have an idea there are a couple of bottles of champagne somewhere in the house."

"Oh, Daddy, you darling," said Eve.

Later, up in her bedroom, Eve changed from her shooting-suit into a frock which she knew would please Michael. Midnight-blue georgette with a diamante belt, a huge flower to tone on the left shoulder; silk stockings, silver shoes. This done, from sheer habit she lifted her lip-stick from the dressing-table, but, with a smile, put it down again.

"Michael hates rouge on my mouth. I shan't use it any more," she thought.

She was in love, and it pleased her to sacrifice her own wishes for her lover. She looked at her glowing face in her mirror, and was glad she was pretty and that she had bought this frock at Maud Moore's sale and that it suited her so well. All to please Michael—darling Michael.

She thought of his first kisses; the more ardent embrace they had exchanged down in the hall just now, before he went home to change. Her heart leaped.

"I do love him so," she thought.

And she thought of all the beautiful days ahead of them ; the glorious Christmas they would have ; the fun, furnishing Pear-Tree Cottage at Ashingdon ; the thrill of becoming a doctor's wife, helping him in his career.

What would Poppy Crawford and Bobby and Toffee and her crowd say when they heard ? They would probably think her foolish to marry. They would find Michael too quiet, too *decent* for their fancy.

"I shan't see much more of them from now onward," thought the new and exalted Eve. "I shall try to become worthy of Michael. He would loathe that crowd."

She wondered why she had ever imagined Michael dull, or found him awkward, lacking in imagination. In her excited fancy she painted him now with a dozen glowing colours. She dwelt on the quiet strength, the nobility, the beauty of the man's character. She thought with tenderness of his exquisite love for little children, the name he would make—which she would help him make—as a children's specialist.

She hung round the hall, waiting, until she heard Michael's car drive up to the door. She was the one to open it, to let him in. She saw him standing before her, fresh, clean, glowing from a quick bath and shave, fair hair turned to gold by the light of the hall-lamp. She felt overwhelming love for him, and walked into his arms.

"Michael, darling Michael," she said.

He did not speak, but caught her to him.

2

The days which followed the celebration of Eve's engagement to Michael seemed to fly by so quickly that she was given no time to grow bored, which—with her moody, restless temperament—might have been the case had she had to endure a long engagement.

The Walton-Evans made no objection to their daughter marrying a steady and charming fellow like young Graham, who had a practice, a house to step into, and a certain £1,200 a year. He was not a rich man, but his prospects were excellent. And, although Eve had had a very

comfortable existence, she had not been brought up luxuriously.

So no difficulties were raised by either Giles or Beatrice when Michael and Eve fixed January 8th for their wedding. Michael was to take over Dr. Oliver's practice at the end of the month, so they would have a fortnight's honeymoon and a week in Ashingdon to prepare their home. There was some little disappointment about that for Eve. She had wanted to have furniture and carpets and wall-papers of her own choosing. She felt it would have been such fun going round town with Michael, buying what they wanted. But Dr. Oliver was retiring to Switzerland, and wished to dispose of all his household effects. It had seemed the best thing for Michael to purchase them with the practice.

"We can soon sell what we hate and gradually buy what suits us, darling," he told Eve. "But really it will save a lot of time and trouble if we can walk into our home, and I'm anxious to start work, as you know."

Eve was gracious and amiable about it, and smothered her disappointment nobly. Nothing seemed to matter much to her at the moment but pleasing Michael. And his work was the most important thing of all. She looked forward to rapid progress, and the future splendour of Michael, specialising in London, herself a popular Society hostess entertaining for him and securing him many small wealthy patients.

Meanwhile, she was content to start in a small way; even eager to make any sacrifices necessary to aid his career. And, after all, they were very lucky. Michael had his private income of £200 a year, which brought the total to £1,400, and many a young doctor and his wife had started on far less.

Giles Walton-Evans did his bit for the young couple. He gave Eve a generous sum for her trousseau, and he settled a hundred a year on her. That was another two pounds a week toward comfort for Eve and Michael. Eve was very grateful to her father. He had always been good to her, and there was genuine affection between them. So far as her mother was concerned, Eve felt they would become very much better friends when they ceased to live under the same roof.

The days flew by, and Christmas came before they all knew where they were. It was the jolliest Christmas Eve had ever spent. On Christmas Day there was open house and hearth at Eve's home. Michael and the Flamings dined with the Walton-Evans. Mr. Walton-Evans was never happier than when he was being the perfect host. He liked to see many happy faces round his table, and the table groaned under a load of good things.

Anne and Humphrey had more or less expected Michael's engagement, and they were pleased about it. Anne had grown fond of Eve. She was not blind to the younger girl's faults and weaknesses, but she believed that she would make a good little wife for her brother.

"Michael has ambition, but he is a very reserved, shy person, and Eve is just the right one for him. She is vivacious and go-ahead. She will be a stimulant to him. It ought to balance very nicely," was Anne's opinion as expressed to her husband.

Eve now frankly adored her future sister-in-law. To Eve, Anne Flaming was a very wise and beautiful woman. And Anne was very good for Eve. She was the finest possible person to influence Eve for the best. Eve no longer had any desire to see her other girl friends. She made Anne her ideal; wanted to model herself upon Anne.

"Self-control is the thing I lack, Anne," she confided to the elder girl. "Yes, I know it. I simply go off the deep end about things and people. You're so calm. How do you do it?"

"I think it's only a question of abstracting your mind, my dear," Anne told her. "When you have to do unpleasant things abstract your mind—don't dwell on the unpleasantness—just quietly go through with whatever you have got to do. You'll find it so much easier than kicking against a brick wall, or raving and ranting."

"I envy you, Anne," said Eve. "You and Mike are alike over that. He never lets himself get ruffled. When I'm throwing myself into a perfect fever because the chairs we ordered were accidentally sold to someone else, Mike just keeps cool and doesn't turn a hair."

"It's so much easier than flying off the handle," was Anne's observation.

"Oh, Anne darling, I'm sure I'm not good enough for Michael," Eve cried, with one of her bursts of humility.

Anne's dark eyes were very tender as they looked at the other girl.

"That's rubbish, my dear. I'm sure you're going to make Mike very happy. And he adores you. You must never, never let him down, Eve."

"I hope I never will," said Eve fervently.

That was just before Christmas. By Christmas Day most of Eve's trousseau had been purchased, and she and Michael had chosen the greater part of the things they would need at Ashingdon beyond the furniture already there. It was fortunate that the Olivers had agreeable taste. On one or two occasions, when Michael went over to Ashingdon to see Dr. Oliver and talk over the details of the practice, Eve had been taken over the cottage by Mrs. Oliver, and her quick eye had noticed everything. She knew just what she liked and what she meant to keep, and just what she would persuade Michael to throw out.

The Olivers were selling them quite a number of genuine old pieces, and one or two charming Persian rugs. It was a blessed relief to Eve to find that no hideous wallpapers awaited her, because the walls in all the rooms were white-washed and striped with oak panelling. Downstairs the floors were of polished oak. She knew that once she was mistress of Pear-Tree Cottage she could make it look charming, and they were lucky to step into a seventeenth century cottage instead of some ugly little house of the Victorian period.

Mrs. Walton-Evans sent out wedding invitations before Christmas, and then of course presents began to pour in, and there was a great deal for Eve to do with her pen. Dozens of letters to be written and answered. Every day was full and exhausting and wonderful. Nearly every day she saw Michael, and found fresh things in him to love and admire, fresh reasons for striving ardently to be worthy of his love.

This was a period of mental humility and very genuine devotion on Eve's part. Michael, as a lover, brought out all the best qualities in her. The weaker, more self-centred, egotistical Eve was temporarily subdued. To Michael she was adorable. He was not the type of man to grow weary of or used to love. He found her love very precious and

exquisite. If he lacked power of expression, he managed to convey his gratitude and worship to her in the silent way she was beginning to understand. For the moment, she was quite content to see the tenderness in his eyes and to feel the passion of his arms and lips, and her very responsiveness in their moments of intimacy was to Michael an unfailing wonder and delight. She seemed to lack nothing, and give out everything a man could want.

And then, before Eve realised it, she woke up on January 8th in the New Year to find that it was her wedding-day.

She looked round her green and white bedroom, at the new open trunks full of clothes, at the litter of boxes, then through the window at the familiar view of Daddy's beloved rose-garden. She could hardly believe that she was leaving it all to-day and that never again would she lie in this room as Miss Eve Walton-Evans.

Last night she had taken down and packed the photographs of friends whom she liked. Others she had burned. They were foolish photographs of foolish people in whom she no longer had any interest. She had kept one of Poppy. She felt she ought not to abandon Poppy altogether. It would be rather priggish, just because she was going to alter her whole life and marry a darling like Michael. She probably wouldn't see much of Poppy in the future, but she would remain her friend, and, after all, Poppy had sent them a very decent wedding-present—a silver sugar-sifter.

Eve smiled with amusement at the memory of the letter Poppy had sent with that present :

MY POOR EVE,—You'll regret this. You're much too young to marry. You haven't had your fling yet. But perhaps you'll have it after—some do. And your young man's very nice. Good luck to you. . . .

As if she would ever regret marrying Michael. As if she could possibly have her fling *after* her marriage. The very thought made Eve grow hot and indignant. She was determined to make Michael a very virtuous, loyal wife. No other man would ever count.

She got out of bed and walked to her wardrobe, opened it, looked at her wedding-dress. It had been made for

her in town by Mummy's pet dressmaker—a copy of one worn by a recent Society bride. It was an exquisite thing of creamy panne velvet, high-waisted, long, with a train of cloth of silver. And she was to wear real orange-blossoms and an old lace veil which Mummy had worn, and which had belonged to Eve's grandmother.

Eve touched a fold of the dress almost shyly. Her face was transfigured. All that was best in her rose to the thought of the tremendous responsibility of the vows she would take in a few hours' time, at Michael's side. They were to be married in Bolney Church. . . . They liked that adorable old church and the simple beauty of the surroundings. It was all so much nicer than Haywards Heath. Afterwards they were going to have the wedding-breakfast at the Gravenhurst Hotel, because there was plenty of room there and Eve's home was not big enough for a reception.

Reggie Coleman was going to be best man. Eve smiled as she remembered him. He had been quite sentimental over his congratulations, and had sent them a handsome tea-service. Little Paddy Flaming was going to hold Eve's train. And two girls who had been at school with her were to be bridesmaids.

Eve and Michael were going to London to-night. Tomorrow they were crossing over to Paris. That was Michael's idea. Personally he would have preferred a more remote spot for his honeymoon. But in his selfless fashion he had taken it for granted that Eve would enjoy the gaiety and amusement of Paris for a few days. Afterwards they might move on to the country—Brittany. They had not definitely decided. They had agreed that it would be fun just to move about when and where they wanted.

Then Mrs. Walton-Evans came into her daughter's room in a state of combined fuss and sentiment, and turned Eve's thoughts to domestic details. They sat on Eve's bed discussing the arrangements for the breakfast at the Gravenhurst; the cake which had come down from Gunter's, the flowers in the church, father's new morning coat, which did not fit as well as he had hoped, cook's unfortunate cold which prevented her going to the wedding, a host of things that didn't seem to matter to Eve, but to which she listened good-humouredly. She only hoped

Mummy wouldn't give way to tears in the church, or find a grievance or some cause for jealousy before the day ended.

The inevitable grievance came about in a very few minutes. Mrs. Walton-Evans, her pale, melancholy face slightly flushed and her eyes avoiding her daughter's, turned the conversation to sex.

"You are only just twenty—very young. I think it my duty, darling, to—er—to——" she paused and coughed.

Eve went hot and cold. She got up, and said very brusquely :

"Oh, that's all right, Mummy. Don't go on."

"But wait, dear. Do you realise what I want to try and tell you—warn you——"

Eve swung round, and showed a crimson face.

"I know exactly. But don't, for the love of Mike, let us go into all the ghastly details, Mummy. Do try and remember that it's the year 1928, and girls are not as ignorant as they used to be."

Immediately Beatrice Walton-Evans expressed shocked disapproval.

"Then I'm very surprised, Eve. I don't know who you should learn such things from if not from your own mother."

Eve walked to her window and opened it wide. The keen January wind whistled through; the curtains bulged out. But Eve wanted cold air at that moment. Where had she learned "such things"? From nobody, nowhere in particular. She was totally ignorant so far as experience went. But she had read; she had talked to girls like Poppy Crawford, and Gabrielle in Paris; she was not a little fool. Even if there were some things she might like to know, the last person on earth she could bear to discuss them with was poor Mummy. And thus ended very abruptly Mrs. Walton-Evans' attempt "to do her duty." She rose from the bed and eyed her daughter resentfully.

"Very well, dear. I'll go along and dress. Apparently you don't want me. Now please do not get up too early and tire yourself. A wedding is a very exhausting affair. Have your breakfast in bed."

Eve sighed. They were ending up as usual: Mummy was hurt about nothing; Eve felt faintly irritated. But this was her wedding-day. She wanted it to be such a happy

one. She couldn't bear even Mummy to have ruffled feathers. So she ran to the slight, drooping figure in the quilted dressing-gown, and hugged it.

"It's all right, Mummy. Don't worry about me. I'm a bad child, but I'm really grateful for all you've ever done for me."

To her relief, her mother departed, mollified, and Eve was left to thoughts of Michael. Thank God she would be living with him in future. He would not be so childishly unreasonable, so easily offended as Mummy. He would be wonderfully easy to live with, she was sure. Her darling old Michael!

At half-past eight Ethel brought in her breakfast, and Mrs. Walton-Evans came too, bearing a huge box.

"From the florist. Your flowers from dear Michael, I expect," she said excitedly.

Eve's heart began to pound when she watched Ethel and Mummy untie the string. Her wedding bouquet. How near the wedding was! She was shaking with sheer nerves when they laid the bouquet on her bed for her to admire. She lifted it up. It was an exquisite sheath of madonna lilies. They were waxed, pure, delicate, and gave out a rich fragrance. It was a moment of intense emotion for Eve. She felt tears rush to her eyes. She wished passionately that she could have been like those flowers, without blemish, for Michael. She saw a card attached to the flowers and lifted it up. It was from Michael, and he had written in his small, precise doctor's hand:

With all my love, for ever. MICHAEL.

The simplicity of that message and all that it signified overwhelmed Eve. What more could he have said? What more could he give her than all his love—for ever?

Aloud she said, in a choked voice:

"They're simply adorable, aren't they?"

3

The wedding was all over. Eve and Michael were married. They were in the dining-room at the Gravenhurst Hotel finishing the wedding-breakfast. Eve, at the

head of the table with her husband, found that she had hardly a moment in which to speak to him. Everybody wanted to monopolise her attention. Only once had she found time to look at her left hand and admire the narrow gold wedding-ring which Michael had put on her finger such a little while ago; realise that she was really a married woman—Mrs. Michael Graham—that she would never be Miss Walton-Evans again.

Her memory of the wedding ceremony was confused. It had all been so breathless and nerve-racking. But she did remember the marvellous thrill of the moment when Michael had slipped the ring on her finger. Their eyes had met for a moment—a wonderful, unforgettable moment—in the hush of little Bolney Church . . . a shaft of rich light filtering through the stained-glass windows on to Michael's bare fair head, on to her veiled orange-crowned one which only reached his shoulder.

Everybody had said it was "a beautiful wedding." Mummy had wept. Relations and friends had showered congratulations on them both. Eve had been hugged and kissed until she was bored. Michael looked his best. He wore a frock coat which really fitted him, and she liked him in a cravat. He had never looked more handsome. She felt incredibly lucky.

In the centre of the table the wedding-cake proudly reared a white frosty head. It was a nice cake, thought Eve. A miracle of sugared art; roses made of icing; silver leaves. And everybody was nice and amiable. There had been no "upsets," except when poor old Aunt Rita had been accidentally placed in a pew at the back of the church by the silly usher; and when Paddy Flaming had become seized with shyness, dropped the bride's train while she was walking up the aisle, and wailed for "Mummy." But what did that matter? Everybody had smiled.

There were speeches to be made before the breakfast ended; a good deal more chatter; more food and drink; more embraces to be endured before the bride finally escaped to her car with Dr. Coleman, who drove her and Mrs. Walton-Evans home. She was going to change into her travelling dress. Mrs. Walton-Evans looked at her daughter almost wistfully when they were in the car.

"Well, darling," she sighed. "So you're married now."

"Good job, too, isn't it, Reggie?" said Eve, feeling suddenly facetious.

"Bad job for me," he said. "But you've got the best chap going in Graham."

"I know," said Eve humbly.

Then they were back at home. Cook was in the hall to watch the bride enter, and said:

"Congratulations, miss—mum—fancy our Miss Eve being Mrs. Graham now."

Mrs. Graham! To hear her new name made Eve's heart shake.

An hour later it was all over—the fuss and ceremony and the good-byes. Eve had given a final kiss to Mr. Walton-Evans, who parted from his daughter with more difficulty than he let her think; another kiss to Mummy, who remained amiable but tearful. Then she found herself in the familiar Darracq driving up to town with her husband.

She thought of the many times she had driven from Haywards Heath up the London Road. But now it was all different . . . everything was changed. She was married. She was with her husband. It was rather marvellous to feel that she would never be alone or lonely again; that she had this dear, dependable person at her side to lean on . . . to love . . . to be loved by . . . for ever.

Michael had little to say for the first mile or two. He was not a man of many words, and he was particularly tongue-tied in moments of great emotion. He was just as happy as Eve, and just as thrillingly conscious of the new important state in which they found themselves. Two trunks and two suit-cases lay in the back of the car—one very new—Eve's cabin-trunk—one old leather one which Michael had brought from Scotland. They were labelled "Dr. and Mrs. Michael Graham, Ritz Hotel, London." Very thrilling . . . those labels. Dr. and Mrs. Graham. How marvellous. And the Ritz. How extravagant. But Michael was a man who liked to do a thing well, and since they were to spend only one night in town they could afford to spend it in luxury.

It was two o'clock now. The sun was still shining, but in a pale, feeble fashion, and the country-side looked raw and cold. But to Eve it was the loveliest day she had ever known. She felt snug and warm in the soft silky brown

fur coat with its attractive silk lining ; Daddy had given it to her for a wedding-present, as well as a canteen of plate and silver. She looked extraordinarily pretty and young. To Michael, it was a miracle that this charming girl should be his wife—his very own.

They were so full of their thoughts that neither spoke till they reached Crawley. Then they had to pull up at the level crossing and wait for a train to pass. Michael lit a cigarette for Eve and another for himself. Then she said :

"Oh, my dear, are we really, truly married?"

"I hope so," said Michael gravely. And then they both laughed. He felt for her hand. She gave him the left. She had refused to cover her bright new ring with a glove. He kissed the hand quickly. "My little wife," he added. "The sweetest little wife in the world."

"It is thrilling," said Eve, "and I'm so glad we've got away from that awful crowd."

"So am I," said Michael. "I can't stand crowds."

"Neither can I," said Eve, quite untruthfully, for as a rule she was never happier than in a cheerful crowd. But she deceived herself into believing that she spoke the truth when she agreed with her husband. She wanted to agree with him to-day. All her best resolutions were still uppermost in her mind. "Mike, I'm longing for our fortnight in France. But," she added honestly, "I'm longing just as much for the day when we can come back and settle in our little home. I shall be so proud of you and your practice. My darling doctor."

"Darling," said Michael. He found her enchanting. "Honestly, I don't feel I ought to have married you. You're so much more bright and alive than I am. Won't you ever find me a bit dull and stupid?"

"You, dull and stupid?" she laughed. "Great silly, Mike! When you're the most enthusiastic, ambitious man in your profession."

"Yes, I'm keen on my work," he said. "But outside that—oh, darling, you won't ever be bored with me, will you? I'm so afraid. I love you so——"

"You needn't be afraid," she broke in. "You'll never bore me. It's much more likely I shall bore you."

Only once more that day did Michael express the fear that he might be too dull and unexciting for Eve. That was much later, at the Ritz, when he came out of his

dressings-room into the bedroom of the suite which they were occupying for the night, and found his wife waiting for him. He saw her standing by the electric fire—a woman, beautiful, ardent, ready for her lover, white young body fresh and perfumed from her bath in nightgown of ivory silk and delicate lace, a wrapper of rose-pink satin; slim bare feet in pink satin mules. Woman, yet still child; innocent; eyes grown suddenly very large. A lock of soft brown hair had escaped from its slide, and was hanging across one flushed cheek. Her hands were nervously locked behind her.

He was almost as shy as she was. It was a new and wonderful experience to Michael Graham, this sweet intimacy of sharing a bedroom with a woman.

It was he who trembled when he took her hands, and gave her the swift, warm glance which scarcely took in the details of the pretty nightgown and the new rose-pink wrapper. It was she who put an end to the nervous strain of things by saying:

"What marvellous pyjamas, Michael . . . and I like your Paisley dressing-gown."

"I hoped you would," he said, with a self-conscious laugh.

And then Eve began to shake, and a dozen confused thoughts flitted through her mind. Michael's awkwardness communicated itself to her. She was dimly conscious of disappointment. She did not want to feel shy. Yet he made her so. She was tired after the long tiring day, the wedding, the getting away; then a theatre; the awful eking out of hours, according to convention and the laws of propriety. She felt it would be so much nicer for all honeymoon couples on their wedding-day if they could be married . . . very quietly, and not meet again until late at night. . . . Things were spoiled by so much waiting and thinking.

Her thoughts rambled on. Michael was still standing dumbly before her, adoring her with his eyes, gently kissing her hands. She said, desperately, trying to joke:

"I'm not used to sharing a bed with anyone. I hope I shan't kick or take all the blankets or tell you my past in my sleep."

"You darling," he said, and then suddenly bent his head

and laid it on her shoulder. "Eve, Eve, my little wife . . . I hope I shall make you happy. I'm not as brilliant, as amusing as heaps of men. But I do love you so."

Her self-consciousness fled. She just flung herself into his arms and clung to him.

"You're the dearest man on earth, and I adore you," she said, her face quite pale with emotion. "I don't want anybody but you. Oh, Michael, darling . . . darling . . ."

He held her very tightly. Ecstasy rushed on them both. He suddenly felt for the electric light switch and turned it off. The room was plunged in darkness except for the still, roseate glow of the electric fire.

Later, Michael slept as quietly, as soundly, as a child, with one arm across Eve. But she was still awake, marveling, wondering, unable to dismiss the thoughts that flitted through her over-excited brain.

She was content. She was happy. Curiosity was no more, and knowledge was hers. This man who breathed peacefully at her side was hers. She was his.

But she wondered if all marriages were like her marriage, if all men were like Michael, if the white flame of their young passion would live for ever, or if it would burn less fiercely in time to come, then flicker out. Then she was seized with a sensation of extraordinary loneliness; she wanted to cry. She could no longer bear Michael to sleep so calmly, to leave her alone with her thoughts in the warm dusk of their bridal chamber. She pressed close to his side and cried in a kind of panic:

"Michael . . . Mike!"

"Darling," he said drowsily. And in an instant he was awake, and she was in his arms. Comparisons and doubt and thought itself had ceased to be.

CHAPTER III

I

Two years later, the spring of 1930, Eve and Michael sat in their oak-beamed dining-room finishing breakfast. Michael was looking through the *British Medical Journal*, which had just come through the post. Eve was reading a letter from Poppy Crawford.

"Is there another cup of coffee, darling?" said Michael.

"M'm," said Eve. She laid down Poppy's letter with a sigh, threw away the dregs in Michael's cup, and poured him out fresh coffee. As she handed it back to him she looked at him. There was no particular affection in her expression. It was a resentful look, if anything. Michael did not see it. He was absorbed in his journal. He appeared very little older than he had looked on his wedding-day, two years ago. The April sunshine threw up the bright lights of his fair hair. Still rather rough, untidy hair that refused to lie down. But he looked fresh and pleasant. The untidy hair, however, worried Eve more than usual this morning, and she hated his black coat and the striped trousers. Horrible doctor's suit. Always the same. She rarely saw him in any other suit, except, occasionally, on a Saturday afternoon, when he got into plus fours and played golf with her. But most Saturday afternoons, as soon as he changed, the telephone-bell would ring, and he had to take his horrible little bag and rush out to answer what Eve called some "footling call." Mrs. Cheeseman of Ivy Lane had a bad hand, or old Whitter up in the village wanted a mixture for his asthma, or Miss Rubie—disgusting, fat old Jewess in that wonderful house on the hill, much too good for her—had a mythical headache and wanted Michael. An excuse for talking to him. "Dear Dr. Graham," she called him. His fair, clean, boyish type appealed to her. She was willing to pay half-a-guinea a visit for nothing at all. It made Eve sick. Her golf went west, and nobody cared.

Michael laid down his medical journal, pushed back his hair, and lit a pipe. He looked across at his wife.

"Who's your letter from, darling?"

"Poppy," said Eve.

Michael puffed thoughtfully at his pipe. His heart sank a little. During these last few months he had learned that, when Eve spoke in that cold hard voice and refused to meet his gaze, she was feeling in a bad mood. And Eve's bad moods meant that she was discontented, irritable, out of love with him and the world and herself. He had noticed that as a rule Miss Poppy Crawford's letters had that effect. Michael disliked Poppy and her friends. He had hoped that Eve would not see much of Poppy after they came to Ashingdon, but Poppy's father had died last winter, and Poppy, with twelve hundred a year of her own and complete freedom, had left Haywards Heath and taken a flat in town. Eve had gone up to one or two parties recently, and come back full of Poppy's "wonderful clothes," and the good times she had.

Michael supposed he could have asked Eve not to revive her friendship with Poppy. But he felt he had no right to do that. After all, Eve had rather a dull time as the wife of a practitioner in Ashingdon. He realised that, if she could get up to town and have a "binge" occasionally, there was no harm in it. But it seemed a pity that the "binges" always had such bad after-effects.

Through the spiral of smoke from his pipe, Michael regarded Eve with tenderness—a tenderness that had increased on his part, not wavered for a single second, since their marriage. She had not grown up a bit, he thought. She was, if anything, prettier to-day than she had ever been. Just a shade plumper, but still slim enough to suit the fashion of the day. Her brown shingled head was not cropped quite so closely. She had let it grow long at the sides and wore it curled over both ears. This morning she looked charming. A girl of eighteen, rather than a married woman of twenty-two.

But the charm of the picture she made was spoiled by drooping lips and a lined forehead.

Michael strolled round to her side, and ruffled the bent head.

"Cheer up, darling," he said. "Don't look so miserable. What's wrong? Anything in Poppy's letter upset you?"

"Oh, don't mess my hair, Michael," she said irritably.

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"Oh, all right, if you feel like that, dear," he said, his face flushing. He walked away from her.

"I'm sorry, Mike," she said quickly, looking after him. "But I'm cross."

"Why, darling?" He turned back to her, ready to forgive her unfriendly gesture. "What's up?"

"I'm rather fed up, that's all."

"Sorry for that. Can't you tell me why?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said, frowning. "Poppy seems to be having such a ripping time. She's just come back from Monte Carlo with Toffee Marsden and some others, and had a gorgeous holiday, and now she's getting up a motor-caravan holiday in the New Forest with a whole crowd, and wants me to go, but, of course, I can't get away."

"If you want to very much——" Michael began.

"You know I can't!" she broke in petulantly. "I can't leave the cottage to run itself, and anyhow, I've promised to open a beastly village bazaar in aid of the blind or something, on the first of May. That's next week."

"It's a nuisance for you," he said. "But there you are, darling—the painful duties of the doctor's lady."

"I loathe village bazaars," said Eve, "and that awful crony of yours, Miss Rubie, pawing me and calling me 'dear little Mrs. Graham,' just because she likes *you*. She's getting up the bazaar. It was she who roped me into it."

Michael laughed.

"Poor old Rebecca—she's a ghastly bore, I know, but she's most kind-hearted, and, for the Lord's sake, be nice to her. She's one of my richest patients."

"I know," said Eve gloomily.

"Well, I must get off, darling," he said. "I've got a biggish round this morning. There's such a lot of 'flu about. Mind you're careful. Bye-bye, sweetheart."

"Good-bye, darling," she said absently. He kissed her upturned face and walked out of the room. As he went, he said:

"Sorry about the New Forest crowd. But if you can manage it——"

"I can't," she called back.

She rose and walked to the window.

The little set garden in front of Pear-Tree Cottage was

beautiful with the young spring green of fruit-trees and the gay variety of many bulbs. A flagged path led to a little white gate, which bore proudly the shining brass plate, "Dr. M. Graham, M.D." Beyond the gate was the Lewes-Ashington Road, and a few yards to the left the village of Ashington—a straggling little row of shops and cottages, a garage, red and blatant with petrol-pumps, the local "pub."—the Barley Mow. To the right lay country . . . opposite, the sweep of downs, green, curving against the sky . . . then Lewes, with its ruined castle, grey old gaol, chalk-pits, and curving river.

One could see it all from the windows of Pear-Tree Cottage. Ashington village stood high up. The cottage was on the crest of the hill, nothing in front of it to spoil the view.

But to Eve Graham it was a view of which she was heartily tired. She was used to it. Used to the beauty of the downs, the romantic silhouette of the castle in the hazy distance; the exquisite little garden, the attractive old cottage itself.

Yet only two years ago last January she had come here with Michael, fresh from their honeymoon in France, and had adored every beam in the cottage and every inch of the ground outside it.

While she stared out at the sunlit garden this morning, she thought how frightful it was that one changes so . . . that one's whole outlook on life can alter in less than two years. Life with Michael had seemed, at first, a great adventure. Fun being able to order the food and run the household instead of complying with Mummy's rules and regulations at home. Fun watching Michael go off on his rounds; fun getting him back for lunch; exciting, at first, never to know when he would be home—or when he would be called out. How proud Eve had felt of her doctor . . . relieved to see the patients come. And then, the first few times when he had been rung up on the telephone, or roused by the front-door bell in the middle of the night. Eve had felt in sympathy with them all—quite a heroine, rising from her warm bed to help Mike throw on a few clothes and get his bag. And when he came back, cold, tired Eve wakened again to welcome him back to the blessed warmth and comfort of her arms.

But those had been the early days—the first six months—after which the exciting events became just ordinary routine. Then routine became dull, and finally aggravating. It was a bore to be disturbed at night. Last winter she had told Michael that she really could not share the same bed if he was going to have such a lot of night-work. So they had two beds now, and when Michael came home it was not to her warm one, if she could help it, but to his own.

It was also a bore never to know when her husband would be at home, never to be able to plan even a day ahead. If she accepted an invitation to a dinner in the district, Michael was sure to be rung up before the evening ended, and leave her to go home alone. As for taking a whole day and evening off to go up to town and do a show or a dance—out of the question. The one and only local doctor could hardly slip off and let his practice go hang.

Of course, Eve knew it was all Michael's duty, and a question of working up a practice and saving money and that sort of thing. But it seemed pretty wretched for her. She was only twenty-two; she wanted a good time. She had been used to a cheery time in the old days at home. (Eve obligingly forgot the rows with Mummy in those days, and how she had told everybody that it was very dull in Haywards Heath.)

Now, the result was that she had to get her pleasures without Michael. He never complained. She gave him his due. If she stayed in town and left him for a night he did not reproach her. He was unfailingly good-tempered and sweet. He always said:

"Of course, run along, darling. I shall be all right."

But, when she did go, she could not honestly enjoy herself. Michael's very kindness and patience heaped coals of fire on her head. She kept thinking about him, wondering if cook and Alice, their little house-parlourmaid, were looking after him properly, or if he were sitting in the drawing-room at night, lonely without her, missing her. It all spoiled her pleasure. That was her trouble, Eve thought. She could not be entirely callous and selfish like Poppy. Even if life at home with Michael had become boring, she still loved him, could not deliberately hurt him.

Sometimes, when she was feeling particularly bad-tempered, she wished Michael would have a hearty row with

her. She often tried to goad him into one. She felt a thorough eruption would do her good. She wanted hard treatment, and she knew it. But Michael stubbornly refused to quarrel; could not argue with her for long. Sneers or reproaches from Eve made him shut up like a clam. If he suffered he suffered in silence. And at the close of a very one-sided quarrel, when Eve realised how "beastly she had been," how unworthy she was of her husband's big, tireless devotion, she would fling herself into his arms, weeping, and he always forgave her and forgot all about it. Michael never bore malice. Neither did Eve. But, unfortunately for them both, her feeling of *ennui* in the home increased every day, and it was affecting Michael. He saw it, and could do nothing to ease the situation. He was so tied, hand and foot, to his little practice; he loved it, and he felt that even for Eve's sake he could not neglect it. But he was growing worried. He and Eve were slipping further away from each other every day. He still adored her. In fact, so far as Michael was concerned, the marriage had turned out a success. But he was very much afraid it was not quite such a success in her estimation.

Eve felt that she would be quite happy if she were not so bored. Hers was not the temperament to stand routine from one year's end to another. To her the essence of life was variety. Michael's nature liked a quiet environment. He was a consistent man, and he liked to lead a consistent life. But she never had been able to fasten her attention upon any one thing for any length of time. Just as her childish infatuations for various friends and occupations had died a speedy death, so had her enormous enthusiasm for marriage and her husband petered out.

Consequently, after two years in Ashingdon as Michael's wife, she had given out all she had to give him. She now wanted something else to provide a thrill in life and revive her enthusiasm. That she wanted somebody else she would not admit. She was bored, but she had not wavered even mentally from the path of fidelity to her husband. Michael was and would remain her husband. If she had ceased to regard him as a lover—well—that could not be helped. One got so used to intimacy, to passion. How could one continue to be thrilled by it? Eve supposed she would settle

down in time to a quiet and unexciting existence, and sublimate her desires to a higher purpose. Married women who had intrigues with lovers and got their thrills on the sly were beastly. Eve felt that she could never possibly behave like that.

Michael was right to be enthusiastic about his work. But was he right just to shove her entirely on one side? She could not, surely, be expected to give up everything at her age, and become like Mrs. Harrison, for instance, wife of George Harrison, a local gentleman farmer. She was a big-boned, heavy-faced girl, who lived in tweeds and had straight, unbecoming bobbed hair—flat at the back and bristly at the neck—and thick ankles. George Harrison, himself, had developed into a stodgy farmer, perpetually in riding breeches, gaiters, and mud-caked boots.

Must she settle down and become like Dora Harrison, Eve asked herself. Perish the thought. She clung to her love of the thrills and frills of life. She could not imagine Dora Harrison either giving or receiving a thrill, and she must have discarded frills in her cradle.

Who else was there in Ashingdon to amuse or interest Eve? Not a soul whom she could honestly call "nice and matey"; not a girl who knew how or when to dress or had anything exciting to talk about. Michael had friends. He got on very well with George Harrison because Harrison had some shooting, and during the winter, on the days when Michael could steal a march from his work, he either went shooting with Harrison or with his father-in-law. He also had his friend, Reggie Coleman, who often drove over from Haywards Heath to see him. But facetious Reggie had never amused Eve, and now that she was a little older and more experienced, he amused her still less. She left Michael to discover the "real worth of him." Michael always managed to find the "real worth" in everybody.

Of course, Mummy and Daddy came over to Pear-Tree Cottage, and almost every Sunday night Eve and Michael had supper with them. That was not very exciting. Mummy would ask a lot of questions, such as, "Are you sure you are happy?" and, "When are you going to give me a little grandson . . . a darling boy you could call after his Uncle Eric?"

As for the grandson, well, there was no chance of that at present. Eve would not have minded the hardship of bearing a child—in fact, she rather wanted it. She always welcomed a fresh experience. And Michael, who adored children, would have liked a child of his own tremendously. It so happened that Eve's union with Michael remained unfruitful, which rather surprised both them and everybody else. But as Mr. Walton-Evans remarked in his philosophic fashion: "Plenty of time—plenty of time—they're young yet."

Meanwhile, there was no infant to add an interest to matrimony and give Eve more to do. So Eve had a lot of time on her hands in which to do nothing but think. And that, in her present state of mind, was bad for her. For she kept on thinking of all the things she wanted to do and couldn't do, and deploring the things she was forced to do and disliked.

She still very genuinely loved Michael's sister. Anne's influence was strong upon her when they were together. Often when Eve left Anne, after a day with her, she returned to Michael in a soft, unselfish mood that enchanted him. Never to Anne would Eve admit that life in Ashingdon was not quite the perpetual honeymoon she had visioned. But unfortunately she did not see much of her sister-in-law. Humphrey had been promoted in March, and the Flamings were up in Derby at the moment.

Eve felt the separation from her best and most valuable friend keenly. But it seemed to Eve that people in this world were completely bound on all sides by hateful duty. Anne disliked Derby very much. Duty to her husband kept her there. Major Flaming disliked it. His job kept him there. In the past, Anne had said to Eve:

"The whole secret of happiness is being contented with what you've got, and following the philosophy, Don't worry—it will be all the same in three weeks' time."

But whilst Eve continued to admire Anne and envy her such philosophy, Eve had another theory about life in these days.

In her opinion money was the true foundation of happiness. Love was all very well. One didn't want to do without it, either. But love without money was very difficult. The sentimentalists and idealists who said that

one could be happy in a hovel if one was in love made this mistake : one could be happy in a hovel *if* one was in love. But one never remained in love ; hence, no happiness. At twenty-two, after two years of marriage, Eve boasted that she was a cynic.

It was not that she and Michael were poor. Far from it. They had a very decent income for a struggling doctor and his wife. But they had not nearly enough. If they were rich they would be in London now. Michael would be a specialist, and she would be having a wonderful time, entertaining for him. She was sure she would be quite content with life then—much more ready to put up with funny old Mike's quiet, dull ways and lack of expression, which irritated her so at Pear-Tree Cottage ; much more keen to stay in her own home instead of constantly trying to get away from it, and find her amusements outside.

Yes, money did not necessarily mean happiness, but it would go a long way toward inducing it. In town, she would have a different circle of friends ; meet musical and artistic people—even interesting surgeons, the " big bugs " in Michael's profession. But down here in Ashingdon . . . oh, what a bore ! Nothing exciting happened from one day's end to another, and she didn't suppose it ever would.

2

Eve stood staring at the little garden for a long while, lost in introspective thought. Last spring she had taken up gardening quite ardently. Michael had often come in from his rounds to find her bending over flower-beds, weeding diligently, hands in old gloves to keep her nice nails from " going to pot," as she called it. But this spring she had hardly touched the garden. Old Tom Rodgers from Ashingdon nurseries had planted all the bulbs and done all the weeding.

The telephone-bell rang sharply.

" Damn," said Eve.

She strolled into the tiny hall to answer the call. Two years ago she would have rushed, heart throbbing with excitement and eagerness to take a message for Michael.

" Hello," she said. She hoped that it was Poppy from

town ; something to relieve the monotony. But she was soon disillusioned about that.

" Is it the doctor's 'ouse ? " said a woman's voice.

" Yes," said Eve. " Mrs. Graham speaking."

" Is the doctor in, mum ? "

" No. He's just gone out."

" Oh, dear. D'you think he'll call in 'ere ? " said the whining voice.

" Who is it ? " asked Eve.

" Mrs. Moppert speaking. Mr. Moppert, 'e's been up all night with pain in 'is stummick——"

" Very well, the doctor will come. I'll give him your message, Mrs. Moppert.

She hung up the receiver and wrote the message on the block by the telephone. Michael could see it when he called in during the morning. She was going to take the bus into Brighton. If only she had a car of her own. She had hoped Michael would have saved enough money to buy her an Austin Seven, just for her to run about in, but he couldn't do it. Must save every penny.

Disconsolately Eve wandered into the kitchen. She had to give the daily orders to cook. Cook was old and crotchety, and the one person in the cottage to whom Eve felt forced to be polite whether she wanted to or not. Cook obviously loved " the doctor " ; was contemptuous of her, the mistress, because she never had the least idea how much to order of anything. She hated cook.

Alice, the little red-haired maid, preferred Mrs. Graham. She wore pretty clothes and had real silk lingerie. That intrigued Alice. She spent a lot of time smelling the scent bottles on Mrs. Graham's dressing-table, and trying her face-powders, in between the dusting.

Cook met Eve this morning with a baleful eye.

" I'd like to say at once, I shall go at the end of the month, mum," she announced.

Eve's heart sank. She yearned to pick up the nearest saucepan, throw it on the floor with a hideous smash, and say : " Go and be damned ! " But if she let cook go, it would mean an awful business—half-crowns here, five shillings there, at registry offices. Nasty, thieving places, where smug-faced women assured one they would find one " a suitable servant," and that was the last one heard.

No, she could not afford to let cook go, particularly as she suited Michael.

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear this, cook," said Eve, in a voice of honeyed sweetness. "Is anything wrong?"

Cook, thin, withered, hard-lipped, grey hair screwed back from her hatchet-face, stood behind the kitchen table with the air of a magistrate passing judgment. Everything was wrong. Alice had been cheeky. Alice spilt the milk on the kitchen floor every day. Cook had to wipe up after her. Alice was no help at all. Cook couldn't stand it. The local tradesmen never sent the food in time, then Mrs. Graham was annoyed when meals were late, etc., etc.

Eve listened, hating cook profoundly. Half the wrongs were imaginary. All excuses for making trouble. Part of cook's life to make trouble. Eve, still yearning to fling the horrid old woman out of doors, besought her to remain.

"I'll speak to Alice and ask her to be more careful, cook. You mustn't think of going. The doctor would be so sorry. You've given every satisfaction. I hope you'll think it over. Alice is young; you must make allowances."

Cook's mouth looked like two strips of leather sewn together.

"I'm sure I like working for the doctor," she said.

Eve swallowed the bitter insinuation that cook disliked working for her.

"That's all right. Then you mustn't leave us, cook."

"Oh, well, perhaps if Alice gets on with her work and doesn't hinder me so . . ."

Cook condescended to descend from her pinnacle of outraged propriety; consented to stay. Eve then conversed amiably with her on the subject of food for the day, took the list of groceries required, and retired to her drawing-room.

"Old brute," she muttered viciously. "Next time she makes a row Michael can deal with her, since she likes him so much."

She rang the bell for Alice, and lectured her. Still rather the hypocrite—not so much blaming Alice as appealing to her. "Cook is no longer young . . . you must try and be tidy in the kitchen, Alice. I know it is difficult—

that you would rather work with a younger cook, but try and get on with her ; I don't want to have to make a change," etc., etc.

Eve felt, at the end of it, that she was in the hands of both cook and Alice, and had been most hypocritical and disloyal to the pair of them.

She wandered round the tiny drawing-room, smoking a cigarette, and pondering rather bitterly about life as a married woman. It was really something like hard work, running a house. And it was the lack of money that made things so hard. Whichever way one looked, it was money that mattered. If she were rich she would have a large staff, and one got the best type of servant with a big staff in London. Of course, one paid enormous wages, but what did that matter if it meant peace and comfort ? Away with people who said the more money and servants you have, the more worries you have. Eve refused to believe it.

She stared round her drawing-room. Then her eyes softened. She was a little pig to be so irritable and discontented. After all, this was an adorable cottage, and she loved dear old Michael. They had furnished this room with great care and thought. They did agree about old furniture. And Mike had quite good taste in pictures.

There were three beautiful etchings in here ; the Whistler over the fireplace was exquisite. No carpet—just three good Persian rugs ; lovely faded colours—irregular—dark-blue suddenly fading into pale-blue ; a red patch finished off with orange. A window-seat with blue and orange cushions, two deep chairs, and a small Chesterfield, covered in blue and orange cretonne to tone ; an old Dutch desk, dark and polished ; on it a vase made at the Sussex Potteries, filled with daffodils. On the mantelpiece there were two charming old Toby jugs, full of spring flowers, a lovely Dresden shepherdess—wedding present from Eve's Aunt Rita—and two *famille rose* plates.

Eve finished her cigarette, then, with a sudden burst of energy, set to work to change the water for the flowers and cut the stems. Everything about her was beautiful, charming. She was really very lucky, and thousands would envy her.

She had prided herself, when they first came to the cottage, on taking special care of Michael's consulting-room.

"The Insulting-Room," she called it, and supposed that a thousand other doctors' wives gave the same name to that special holy of holies where most of the good work was done.

She walked into this room this morning to dust Michael's roll-top desk, which he did not like Alice to touch. It was littered with papers and letters; a row of medical dictionaries and books on top of the desk; one photograph in a leather case—Eve in her wedding-dress—the one Michael liked best of her. She dusted that with a grimace.

"How smug and self-satisfied you look," she muttered. "'First-class ticket to heaven' sort of look."

And then thought:

"You're fatter than you were then."

Eve smiled as she dusted, and shook the brown curtains into more attractive folds. Then she looked guiltily at the cupboard where Michael kept his instruments. She had promised to clean them for him. She must remember. Through the glass doors she could see rows of bottles, little blue bottles, labelled POISON, tall white bottles with glass stoppers, powder jars, pots of salve; rolls of snowy cotton-wool and pale pink lint and gauze, boxes of bandages. A perfect chemist's shop, Michael's little dispensary.

She caught sight of the wash basin, separated from the rest of the room by a folding wood screen which a great friend of Mike's had made for him—a young surgeon with a taste for carpentering.

"Alice hasn't cleaned those taps. I must call her," she said, clicking her tongue impatiently. "She is a careless girl!"

She went out into the hall, calling for Alice.

Later she went up to her bedroom to change her dress for a suit and jumper. It was a very pretty bedroom. Eve at twenty had wanted a white suite, but white would not have gone with the dark beams, so she had chosen mahogany, and now she was glad of it. The old spinet, which she and Michael had bought so extraordinarily cheap at a sale in Lewes, converted into a dressing-table with an old mirror was charming. With modern taste, Eve had chosen divan beds without heads or tails, and had made the green and brown covers to match the curtains.

She hummed a tune as she put on a grey tailored suit and grey felt hat. She felt happier.

She decided that she had been rather short and beastly to Michael at breakfast this morning. She would be much nicer at lunch-time when she came back from Brighton.

Good intentions are often frustrated by disagreeable circumstances. At the end of a morning's shopping in Brighton and the long drive back in the bus, Eve was a little tired, and when she got back to the cottage and was told by Alice that the doctor had been detained and would not be back for lunch until two o'clock, Eve was cross again.

"How annoying," she thought. "Just because I've ordered steak and cook's cooked it. It will be tough as leather when Michael comes. However, it isn't my fault."

Michael arrived home at ten minutes past two. Eve had finished her own lunch and was in the bathroom, washing her hands. She heard him come in. He put his bag in his consulting-room, and came up to wash his own hands. He looked tired. But he smiled when he saw Eve.

"Hello, darling. Sorry I'm so late."

"Oh, it doesn't matter to me," she said. "But your lunch is spoiled."

"Oh, well, never mind," said Michael.

He pushed up his cuffs and advanced to the basin. Eve sat on the edge of the bath and watched him. Somehow it annoyed her unreasonably because he was so late.

"We shall never keep a cook if meals go on like this, Michael," she said.

"Never mind about cook, darling. Give me a kiss," said Michael, turning round to her.

She did not move to him. She let him kiss her. He dried his hands briskly with the towel.

"Now for a bite. I'm hungry," he said.

Eve went downstairs with him. She was frowning. To her it was strange that Michael could preserve his good temper always, whatever was said or done to him. It did not seem human. And, being so very human and full of frailty herself, she felt unable to cope with something that approached divine patience.

"Well, what kept you so late?" she asked him, as she sat on the window-seat in the dining-room, watching him attack the over-done and unsavoury steak.

"Mrs. Morton's kid is pretty bad," he said.

A sick child. It would be. Michael was almost stupid about his children patients. He would rather go without his lunch at all than hurry over the case of a sick child.

"Is the child dying?" she asked.

"I hope not, darling. I'm doing my best."

"What's wrong?"

"You wouldn't understand if I told you, darling."

"Don't, if you don't want to, Michael."

He looked up at her.

"Why that tone?"

"Well, you always refuse to tell me anything about any of your patients. If it interests me——"

"Eve, I've told you I can't discuss my cases with you," he broke in. He was growing rather annoyed now. He was tired, and he dreaded an argument. "Let's talk about something else."

"You're very bad-tempered," she said.

Michael's blue eyes stared at her as though he were actually puzzled.

"Eve, I don't understand you," he said. "Do you *want* to quarrel?"

She reddened, and averted her gaze.

"No, only I wish you wouldn't be so late, and I wish you'd talk to me about things."

"Darling, I cannot talk about my cases. It isn't done. You won't find any doctors do it, and, as for being late, I cannot neglect my duty just because of meal-times."

"You neglect everything else for your duty," she said, with sudden passion, raising a flushed face to her husband.

"It's nothing all day long but duty—duty—duty."

Michael pushed his plate back. He had eaten only half his lunch. His heart beat quickly, painfully. He said:

"Tell Alice I don't want any pudding."

"But you've eaten practically nothing, Michael."

"I don't want it. Honestly, Eve, you take all the heart out of me, greeting me with this kind of thing."

It was the first time in their married life that he had ever spoken to her like that, or ever reproached her quite so definitely. The tears sprang to her eyes.

"You don't seem to understand how dull it is . . . how sick I get of just sitting about waiting for you . . . and you're never in. I might as well not be married

... I'm so lonely. Even at night you get called out. There's no companionship in it. And you've always got the car. I can't do anything—anything!"

She choked. The tears ran down her cheeks. Then she buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, I daresay I'm horrid—selfish. I oughtn't to have married a doctor," she added. "I'm not fit to be a doctor's wife."

Her resentment against Michael ended up with a burst of self-reproach, of inferiority.

He sat very still for a moment, staring at her. His eyes were the eyes of a man who is baffled, who finds himself up against something he cannot understand, cannot deal with. When he had first fallen in love with Eve and married her he had known she was of a totally different temperament to himself. He had realised that she was the modern girl—restless, excitable, out for a good time. Yet he had seen so much more in her than that. He had found golden qualities under the surface. And she had been so passionately in love with him; had adored him; assured him she would always find contentment at his side.

For one hideous moment it struck him that their marriage had been a mistake. He realised that life in Pear-Tree Cottage as a doctor's wife did not suit Eve; that she was like a fish out of water here.

But only for a fleeting moment did Michael allow that feeling to possess him. Then he put it away from him. It was too alarming, too terrible. If he began to think that Eve had never really loved him, did not really love him now and was not happy with him, it would just mean the end of things for him. He tried to think of life without her, but could not even visualise it. He could not bear the thought that he had failed to make her happy. It was typical of him that he should take it for granted that he had failed her—not that she was failing him.

He got up, walked to her, took her in his arms.

"Eve, my darling . . . my darling, please don't cry."

She was stiff, unyielding for a moment; then she relaxed, and cried like a child, with her arms about his neck.

"I'm sorry, Mike. . . . I'm a selfish little beast."

"You're not. You're sweet. You're sweet," he said. He kissed her hair and the nape of her neck. He was still

her lover, her most ardent admirer. "You're too good for me, Eve. That's what it is. It's rottenly dull for you. I know it. But don't get tired of it, or me. I couldn't bear that."

"Oh, I'm not—I'm not!" she sobbed, hugging him. She felt now that she had hurt him. She was genuinely remorseful. "I'm not tired of you, Mike. I swear it."

"I couldn't bear that," he repeated. His long fair face was flushed and puckered. "We've been so happy."

"He has," thought Eve. "I wonder if I have."

"I'm working for you," he went on. "If I didn't stick to my duty—work hard at my practice—I'd never get on, darling. Don't you understand? It isn't that I want to neglect you. I hate leaving you alone so much. But you want me to make my way—get to town—and the only way I can do that is to stick at it in Ashingdon for a bit; get experience; save."

She stopped crying; kept her face hidden on his shoulder. He stroked her head gently.

"It's the first time you've ever cried like this, sweetheart," he said. "It makes me very unhappy if I think you're not happy."

She felt the need of comforting him at any cost, even if she knew, deep down in her heart, that the exaltation and idealism of the first day of their marriage had gone—for her.

"I am happy. Of course I am, darling. I only get cross and snappy because I'm a bit bored sometimes."

"I understand," he said. "It's rotten for you. But be patient, darling. I'm doing everything I can to get on."

"I know you are. You're splendid, Michael."

His face cleared.

"You do love me still?"

"Of course," she said vehemently.

"Kiss me, then, darling, and dry your eyes."

She kissed him. He dried her eyes with his own big pocket-handkerchief. The storm passed. The sun shone again. Eve smiled; ashamed of herself. They walked arm in arm into the garden to look at the bulbs. They were good friends again. For Michael, the moment of fear, of dread that he was a failure as this girl's husband, passed. For her, the peevish, resentful mood passed. But whereas he went to his work again believing that the little scene

with Eve had cleared the air, it left a different impression on Eve.

It had made her realise her unworthiness, Michael's great devotion. It had made her ashamed of herself. But the feeling of boredom remained. She was beginning to be frightened of herself and the future.

3

There were, of course, other scenes between Michael and Eve during that spring and summer. Every time Michael blamed himself and not Eve. But once, angered by the sheer selfishness of her outlook, he told her what he thought about it. And after that Eve was a little better. She had wanted pulling together. She was too confident of her husband's patient love and devotion.

There were times when things were not altogether her fault, when Michael tried her beyond endurance. He was excellent as a husband, and he was conscientious and hard-working as a doctor. But as a lover or friend, to Eve he was useless. His lack of expression and his slow-thinking brain maddened her; would have maddened any woman of her temperament.

She found that she had to do all the entertaining, make all the conversation, the effort, if she were to enjoy an evening alone with Michael. If she chatted gaily, Michael listened and answered. If she played or sang, he appreciated the music; if she put on a Charleston record he danced with her, but he was a clumsy dancer, and no partner for Eve, who was swift and graceful.

Then, on the other hand, if she made no effort to say or do anything, Michael said and did nothing. They sat opposite each other in silence. Eve read a book; Michael generally smoked a pipe and stared at the floor.

That maddened Eve. What made Michael so dull? He had a very clever brain so far as medical science was concerned. But outside his profession he was dull—frankly boring. He liked to do nothing at night. Eve supposed he was tired after a long day's work, and just wanted to sit in silence and smoke. But it was desperately hard for her to sit quietly and just watch him.

She was horrified at herself and life when she looked back

and remembered the days of their engagement. Then she had considered it enthralling to sit at Michael's feet while he smoked—just lean against his knees and feel his hand on her hair. All that had passed. She wondered if her feelings for him had been purely physical . . . and if that was why there was nothing left now? It was a terrible thought. Even Eve shrank from it. For marriage was so final . . . and she would have to go on living with Michael . . . always.

She had too much time on her hands. There was still no sign of a child when that summer ended, and she had reached the pitch of brooding over her unhappiness and her mistake in marrying Michael. That she had made a mistake seemed a flagrant fact, now. She never actually let her husband know it. She could not bring herself to create disaster by stating definitely that she regretted her marriage.

And Michael was too engrossed in his practice to see behind the scenes at home. He knew that his wife was bored, but he made allowances for that, and put it down to the dull existence she led in Ashington. He did not think she was actually bored with him, with her marriage.

At times, when he held her in his arms, he found her more silent, more unresponsive than she had been in the first year or two of their union. But, although his own ardour had not cooled, he supposed that women were different in that respect to men. He believed that, in most cases, passion died in a woman before it died in a man. He made allowances for her lack of response. She, on her part, had reached the pitch where passion from Michael was more than a bore—positively unwelcomed. But she accepted it without definite objection because it all seemed part of her duty, and she was still a dutiful, if no longer a loving, wife. Michael, in his sheer simplicity, took it for granted that, because she allowed his caresses, she still wanted them.

By the end of the spring in 1930, Eve reached the wise conclusion that petty quarrelling did not make matters better—rather made them worse—and she became indifferent. At first she had grown excited and impassioned—groaned over her mistakes, her misfortunes. But at the end of the third year of her marriage and life in Ashington, she settled down a little bit. She knew that she could not

make Michael more amusing or thrilling, so she ceased to try. She was bitterly disappointed with marriage, but she endeavoured to hide her disappointment out of the really kindly wish to spare Michael's feelings. Michael was doing all that lay in his power to make her happy, and, if he failed, it was her fault. She knew it.

She was by no means a noble martyr. She tried her best, in her fashion, to be a good wife and not to disappoint Michael. But she had many dark days when she felt so bored, so dissatisfied that she wondered how to keep herself from flying out of the cottage and leaving him.

But these moments, these days, were passing. And to balance them she found periods of real happiness. That August, Anne Flaming and little Paddy came down from Derby, to stay a week with Eve and Michael. Eve enjoyed that. She loved Michael's sister. She wanted Anne to think that she was absolutely happy with Michael.

During one long talk with Anne, however, Eve hinted that she was not altogether pleased with life, and Anne guessed at the true state of affairs between her brother and his young wife. She was at first profoundly distressed. She loved Michael. She had hoped this marriage would be a success. But at the same time she was fond of Eve—saw all the good under the mask of the egotist. She also understood Eve's temperament. The child needed cheering up. She was not twenty-four yet. Young to be stuck in a dull village, performing the duties of a doctor's wife.

"You must go away for a few weeks, Eve, my dear," was Anne Flaming's advice. "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you go away to some friend for a fortnight. I'll stay down here and keep house for Mike, I know Humphrey won't mind."

Eve's eyes grew brilliant.

"Anne, you darling—to understand so. I *do* need a change. Am I very rotten? Mike's so good to me."

"You're not at all rotten. But sometimes one finds life isn't quite what one hoped it would be, and one sinks into a rut which isn't the least good for one. Get out of your rut, old thing. I've been in one, myself. I know the feeling. Get out and then come home again, and you'll be tons better."

Eve took the advice of her sister-in-law. She had every encouragement from Michael.

"I shall miss you horribly, darling, but I think Anne is right. You want a change," he said.

Eve said, with rather a guilty jerk of the heart :

"There are only two places I can go. The old home—or Poppy, in town. Haywards Heath won't be much change. We see Mummy and Daddy every week-end. Would you hate it very much if I go up to town?"

Michael manfully said :

"No—go up to town. Only take care of yourself, darling. I'm not very keen on that crowd."

"I'll take care of myself," said Eve. "Only I do feel I might get a bit of excitement up with Poppy."

4

The feeling of relief that gripped Eve when she finally packed up and got away from Ashingdon was almost dreadful. She hated feeling it. It seemed tragic, when once she had loved and wanted Mike so intensely. Life was strange and incomprehensible. Eve did not understand it, did not understand herself. She only knew she felt almost childishly excited when she found herself in Poppy's flat in Chelsea, felt that she was free, as she had been in the old days, to do what she liked.

Poppy Crawford, who was fond of Eve, in her fashion, expressed herself horrified at Eve's appearance.

"My dear, you look wretched, and you're not nearly as smart as you used to be. Heavens! Is that what marriage does?"

"Oh, I'm very happy with Michael," said Eve, feeling that she must defend her husband. She simply could not admit to Poppy how miserable she was. "And what's the use of being smart in Ashingdon?"

"Well, my poor old thing, come along to the shops and get a new frock or two, and we'll fix up some shows with Toffee. She's in town and so's Bobby. Forget you're married, my dear!"

Eve wanted to forget. But of course she could not. She knew that she must in the end go back to Michael and Ashingdon and the dreary routine of it all. Even the

money she spent on the "frock or two" reminded her painfully of Michael's generosity and kindness. He had given her a cheque for £30 before she left home. He was really a dear. It was a terrible pity she was so bored. She supposed she had no right to be.

She went to a big party at Toffee Marsden's studio that night—more like the old Eve—smartly shingled and manicured, and quite lovely in a new black lace dress. Not quite the Eve who had gone to that studio four years ago with Lawrence Hammond. She looked back on that enthusiastic, inexperienced girl of nineteen, and laughed a trifle sadly. She had changed. A little excitement, a little romance had thrilled her then. Now, after three years of marriage, of little disappointments, of friction, and unromantic truths, she was forced to see life as it was, instead of through blind youth's spectacles. There was nothing very brilliant or wonderful or engrossing about marriage. She felt that there was nothing very much to look forward to, either, except struggling on with her duty.

Toffee's party was like all her parties—gay, amusing, rather exotic. To Eve, it was like being in another world—a world very far removed from Ashingdon. Bobby Richards danced with her. He had not altered. He was the same Bobby; everything was still "marvellous," and the years had not destroyed his thirst for thrills.

"You're looking simply stunning, Eve," he said. "Marriage has improved you."

"I'm glad," she said with a wry little smile.

"I expect you're marvellously happy," he added.

"Marvellously," she said.

Bobby wondered then if she meant what she said. They were dancing in a corner of the studio. She suddenly tripped over his foot. She said, under her breath:

"I've lost my old genius for following my partner, though, haven't I, Bobby?"

When she looked up at him, he was horrified to see her hazel eyes bright with tears. He wondered what emotion could have moved her to those tears, just because she had made a mistake in the dance-step. He was a silly, vapid, useless young man but he had a kind heart, and he had, in his fashion, rather a shrewd wit and judgment. He was

ready to swear, to-night, that although Eve Graham had not spoken one disparaging word of her husband or marriage, she was not really happy. He was sorry. She had been so cheery in the old days.

"You want a few drinks, old thing," he said. "Come and sit down and have some!"

Eve shared a cushion with him in a quiet corner of Toffee's studio, lit as usual with great wax candles, and full of cigarette-smoke, artists, musicians, and poets. Eve sipped a cocktail, and Bobby amused her with foolish talk about the crowd.

Eve listened, and sipped her "Depth Charger" and thought of Pear-Tree Cottage . . . and her husband. It was half-past ten. At this time, more often than not, she was in bed and asleep, and Michael, too. She thought of their occasional "outings" to the Harrisons, the futile attempts of those people to be entertaining. She tried to picture Dora Harrison in this studio . . . how round-eyed and open-mouthed she would be, how incapable of uttering anything but gasps of surprise.

Then, later on, the party became rowdy. She was not enjoying the studio party quite so much at three in the morning. Bobby's limpid eyes were squinting. Toffee, in a boy's flannels, was on a table, step-dancing, and a circle of people stood round her, clapping their hands to the music. Everybody was very noisy, and there was not a breath of fresh air in the studio.

Eve, used to early hours and a healthy existence, felt heavy-eyed and sleepy and a little sick. She was sitting alone, blinking drowsily at the crowd, and wishing she could find Poppy and go home.

A man whom she did not know—white-faced, semi-intoxicated—came up and flung himself down beside her.

"Hello," he said. "You've got the face of Marguerite de Valois. Are you Marguerite?"

"No, I'm not," said Eve, feeling unfriendly. She did not like the look in his eyes.

He bent his head and kissed her shoulder. And then Eve felt suddenly that she loathed this party and all the people in it. Poppy and Bobby were all right . . . but this creature . . . a stranger . . . half-drunk . . . to be so familiar . . . and she was Michael's wife. If Michael

had seen that kiss he would have wanted to thrash the man.

She stood up and smoothed her crumpled lace frock. The man tried to grab her arm and pull her down again.

"Don't be proud, Marguerite," he said. "Don't you know me? I'm Henry of Navarre."

She walked out of the studio and called for her friend.

"Poppy—Poppy, where are you?"

And then suddenly Poppy appeared, dishevelled and wild-eyed; red georgette frock badly crumpled; mouth a red vivid stain in a white little face. She clutched Eve's arm.

"Eve, is that you? I want you. Come on back to the flat, old thing."

"I want to go," said Eve. "Where have you been?"

Poppy drew a sobbing breath. She seemed to Eve to be labouring under some very strong emotion—curious for Poppy Crawford, who laughed and danced her way through life.

"I've been with Norman Roxley . . . in Toffee's dining-room."

"Where is Mr. Roxley, then?"

"Gone home. Come along . . . let's find our coats and then get a taxi. I'm exhausted, and if I'm not careful I'm going to howl."

"My dear, what has happened?" asked Eve.

In the taxi, she heard the whole sordid story. Poppy clung to her, sobbing, distraught. She had to tell someone. None of the crowd would have much sympathy with her, but she felt that Eve would sympathise. . . .

For the last two years since her father's death, Poppy had gone her own sweet way. With twelve hundred a year and the little service flat in Chelsea, she had been able to have quite a good time. Then Norman Roxley, the playwright, had taken her up. She had found him most fascinating. She had not cared a damn about his rotten reputation.

"I lived with him, Eve. I admit it. I lived with him," said Poppy, shuddering with sobs. "And now I'm being punished. He's chucked me."

"Chucked you?" repeated Eve, staring at her friend's bowed, black little head. "You mean——?"

"Got sick of me," said Poppy. "Told me to-night he was through with me."

"Oh, Poppy," said Eve. She felt helpless to offer any real opinion or discuss the affair.

"I loved him. I really do believe I loved him," moaned Poppy. "That was why I made myself cheap. I realise now that it was a mistake. Norman was beastly. . . . He sneered at me to-night. Asked me if I really thought he would marry *me*!"

"Oh, Poppy!" said Eve again, helplessly.

Poppy raised a tear-blurred face.

"I was mad," she whispered. "No man is worth such love as I gave Norman. I simply gave him everything—body, mind, heart, soul."

"No man is worth it except men like Michael," Eve thought. "And they don't get it. Life is all wrong. All upside down."

"Once I read this quotation in a book," said Poppy, in a tragic whisper. "'And what is there in the love of men that women seek it?' God knows what there is. Yet we go on seeking. And men give us nothing in return."

"Norman Roxley isn't the right kind of man. He has a beastly reputation, Poppy. But there are decent men . . . and you must meet one . . . marry one."

"Like you've done?" Poppy laughed hoarsely. "And be bored for the rest of my life—like you are."

"I'm not," said Eve, with a desperate attempt to be loyal to Michael. "Michael is wonderful to me, and anyway, what have you got out of life by escaping boredom? You're rottenly miserable to-night."

"Because I made myself too damned cheap with Norman," said Poppy. She wiped her eyes viciously. "But I'll behave differently with the next man. God . . . how I hate Norman now. . . ."

The taxi drew up before the block of flats in which Poppy lived. Eve got out, stood on the pavement, shivering in the cold grey light of the early morning, drew her fur coat closer about her. She felt horribly depressed. And she had come up to town to have a good time—only to find that Poppy had made a fool of herself over a man, and was now, for the first time in her gay and selfish life, going to

reap a bitter harvest. What decent man would take Poppy for a wife—after she had compromised herself with Norman Roxley? Everybody in town had seen them everywhere.

Eve suddenly felt virtuous and safe in the security of her own position. After all, even if she was bored at Pear-Tree Cottage, she was Michael's wife, and Michael was a better man than any one of the men in Toffee's crowd.

She was kept up until broad daylight by Poppy, whose only relief was in bitter denunciation of Norman Roxley, the beastliness of men, the emptiness of passion.

Poppy talked on and on . . . not only about Norman, but about all the men she knew. She had no real capacity for loving or suffering. She had no power of concentration. Her brain flitted from one thing to another with a rapidity and lack of continuity which almost bewildered Eve, who thought so much more clearly and thoroughly. Every time she tried to get away from Poppy to her own bed, Poppy prevented her. She went on talking.

"Oh, for God's sake, don't go. I must talk to you, Eve, darling, or I shall blow up. I'm damned miserable. Eve, I like the way your hair's cut at the back. Who did it? That reminds me, I must make an appointment with Emile in the morning." Yawn. "God! Norman was damned rude. He was anxious enough to get me. That's the trouble with men. They never leave you alone till they've got you, and when you've caved in, they're finished—don't want you any more. . . ." Yawn. "The world is rotten, Eve. Honestly, you've led a sheltered sort of life compared to me, although you think you're experienced. Did you see that fattish woman in black georgette and the pearls—hennaed hair?—my dear, she's after dear old Bobby. She's fifty, if a day. Likes Bobby because he dances so well. She's the sort that takes a roll of tickets for the sixpennies at a dance-hall. It's disgusting. . . ." Yawn. "Oh, well, I suppose we'll be just the same. I'd rather die than settle down to old age and knitting. I hope I die before men find it a bore to talk to me. Norman says I'm all sex-appeal, and that I haven't got any brains. But it seems to me you get more of life with S.A. than brain-power. Oh, God . . . my head is splitting. . . ."

Eve rose, and regarded the figure of her friend gravely. A black and white little image of fatigue and cynicism to whom sex-appeal seemed a better gift than intelligence.

"You're a queer old thing, Poppy," said Eve. "But I don't agree with everything you say."

"That's because you haven't had the experience," said Poppy, snuggling down under the bed-clothes and shutting her eyes. "You're only just married. But don't be too damned superior, darling. You're bored as it is."

"I'm not——" began Eve dutifully.

"Go to hell, darling—I mean to bed," said Poppy, with a long shuddering yawn. "I'm absolutely worn out with misery. I ought never to have cried in the taxi. My eyes will be ghastly in the morning, and I'm to lunch at the Conservative Club with Clifford Pollington. He thinks he's interested in politics, but he's much more interested in me. And I'm not going to take the veil just because Norman's been a beast. Clifford's got a face like the day before yesterday, but his bank balance is good. Don't look so shocked, darling. You'll come to it. And if your darling doctor gets fed up with you at any time, pass him on to me. It might do him good. Goo'-night. . . ."

Speechless, Eve passed out of the room to her own.

"Poppy's the limit," she thought. "Michael wouldn't look at her."

Before she undressed, she sat down and wrote a long letter to Michael, filled with the sudden desire to tell him that she missed him. It was the most affectionate letter she had written to him for many long months.

She felt almost exalted when she had written it—as though some of her former love and admiration of Michael had revived. She believed that she might find real happiness waiting for her when she returned to Ashingdon to take up the threads of the old life again.

5

Eve stayed a week and then ten days in town with Poppy. For the first few days after her rupture with Roxley, Poppy was genuinely unnerved and miserable, and clung to Eve for support and sympathy. Eve had never been

clung to like that by a friend before, and it flattered her vanity. She remained with Poppy, giving her good advice, forgetting, temporarily, her own sore need of it.

Michael had written passionately from the cottage. He could write his sentiments so much better than he could express them in person. His letters were full of a really touching devotion, and Eve was in the mood to be softened and touched. One paragraph about his little niece brought the tears to her eyes. He said :

“ It is lovely having Anne’s kid here. She’s a little pet. Darling, things haven’t gone very well for us up till now, but I do pray that you and I will have a small kid soon. I would adore to see you with a baby, my Eve.”

Eve felt that she wanted nothing better than to give Michael a son. She was finished with discontent, with grievances, with boredom. She had seen the emptiness, the Dead Sea fruit of frivolling one’s life away like Poppy did. It had brought her nothing but unhappiness. Eve intended to get more out of life than that, and to make Michael really happy when she got home again.

On the eleventh day of her visit to Poppy, Eve was on the point of wiring to Michael to say she was coming home, when he rang her up on the telephone. He hated telephoning, so it immediately struck Eve that either he or Anne were ill, or something disastrous had occurred. She answered the call, her face quite pale with anxiety.

“ Oh, Mike, darling, is it you? Yes . . . what? ”

Her husband’s voice reached her from far away. It was a bad connection. There was a lot of buzzing and droning. But she could just hear what he said.

“ Would you like to come home to-morrow? . . . Something very surprising has happened, darling.”

“ Oh, what . . . tell me quickly,” cried Eve.

“ We’re rich, darling,” came his voice, with his funny, self-conscious little laugh. She knew that laugh. It meant that Michael was unusually excited.

“ Rich? ” She repeated the word incredulously. “ Michael, what *do* you mean? ”

“ It’s amazing,” came his voice again. “ I’ve just heard from my Aunt Jane’s lawyers. . . . You remember Aunt

Jane—Uncle Robert's widow in Scotland. I used to shoot up there when I was a boy."

"Yes, yes," said Eve excitedly.

"Aunt Jane is dead," said Michael. "And she's left me all her money."

"Michael! . . ." Eve's cheeks burned; her eyes blazed with excitement. "How wonderful. But how much?"

"About forty thousand pounds," he said, with another laugh.

Forty thousand pounds. To Eve it sounded like a colossal fortune. She swallowed hard.

"Oh, Michael, *darling*! Hello . . . hello . . . don't cut me off, Exchange . . . Michael, is it you? Darling, how wonderful—you'll be able to come up to town and specialise."

"Sweet of you to think of me, darling. I'm so glad for your sake," he said.

"Michael, I must come home . . . at once . . . the next train. Yes, Poppy won't mind. I must come home. I want to burst, I'm so excited. And if I'm going to burst it had better be at home in the dear old insulting-room, where you can patch me up again."

"Angel," he said. "I'm longing to see you. I've missed you terribly."

"I've missed you. Oh, Mike, isn't Anne pleased?"

"Very, I think, darling."

"Give her my love, and I'll be home within a couple of hours. Michael, I'm going to be so good and helpful. . . ."

She broke off. She realised, suddenly, that although she could be good there was no need any longer for her to be *helpful*. The money they had come into had rather frustrated that good intention. Aunt Jane's legacy was what would help Michael on in his profession now, more than anything.

"My three minutes is up, and I think I'll go, even if I am a rich man now," came Michael's laughing voice. "Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, darling," said Eve.

She hung up the receiver. Then she rushed into Poppy's bedroom.

"Poppy, what do you think?" she said breathlessly. "A miracle has happened. Michael's aunt in Scotland has

died and left him £40,000. We're rich now, Poppy, and we'll be able to get rid of the silly old practice in Ashingdon and come up to town. And I shall have a lovely house and Michael will be a specialist, and oh, Poppy—isn't it wonderful?"

She broke off, panting; so exhilarated by Michael's news that every feeling of care or disappointment in life had fled. Poppy stared at her a moment, then said in a gloomy voice:

"You're damned lucky. Forty thousand pounds isn't to be sneezed at. Why can't I meet and marry a man with a rich Aunt Jane in Scotland?"

"It's too good to be true," exclaimed Eve. "No more life in a poky old village. . . . Of course, I've always been happy with Mike, but now I shall be happier still."

"I don't suppose you will," said Poppy. "Nobody is meant to be happy. However, good luck, old thing. You haven't done as badly as I thought you had."

All the way down to Lewes, which was the nearest station for Ashingdon, Eve was in the highest of spirits, longing to get back and see Michael and Anne, and hear more details about Aunt Jane's money.

She had a thousand things to talk to Mike about. All the plans for their future to discuss. This money would make all the difference to both of them. He could indulge in his love of doctoring children, as a specialist in London. She would actually be able to realise her former dreams of happiness with him; of entertaining for him. In fact, she felt very much as she had felt on her wedding-day—at one with her husband, supremely content. Life had not been so cruel and disappointing after all.

Eve rushed into the cottage that sunlit August morning, longing for Michael, for their reunion. Much as she loved Anne she almost hoped Anne would be out, so that she could enjoy her first meeting with Michael quite alone—have him all to herself. Her hopes were realised. Anne had done the tactful thing, taken Paddy into Brighton for a day on the beach. Michael was there, in the consulting-room; had just come in for lunch from his rounds.

When she saw him, even the fair untidy head and horrid black suit could not depress Eve. She was in a mood of

extreme exhilaration. She flung herself into his arms, panting with excitement.

"Michael, darling . . . isn't it marvellous?"

He held her close, delighted to see her looking so well and so happy. She was radiant, beautiful. He knew how badly he had missed her, then, and his voice shook with deep emotion as he greeted her.

"Sweetheart . . . my Eve."

"Yes, absolutely yours," she whispered, clinging to him, rubbing her cheek against his coat-sleeve. "Don't let's talk about the money for a moment . . . only about our love. I want us to love each other again like we used to, Michael . . . dearest . . ."

The old passion flamed in her again. Perhaps only a final spurt before it flickered out for ever—a spark ignited by the sheer excitement of their reunion and their new, wonderful good fortune. But it was there, and Michael felt it quiver in her slim body as he held her close. For the first time for months he knew her his—as she said—utterly his . . . while her soft mouth responded to his long kiss.

All day long the magic lasted. Michael very reluctantly left Eve to do his afternoon round. They had not had much time to discuss the new good fortune. They planned to talk it all over with Anne to-night.

Anne and her daughter returned from Brighton after tea. After Paddy had been put to bed, and while Michael was seeing patients between six and seven, the two girls sat in the drawing-room, and smoked and talked.

Eve clasped slim bare arms about her knees and looked affectionately at Anne—Anne, never idle, darning a pair of diminutive blue cotton knickers; smooth dark head bent over her work; cigarette between her lips.

"You're rather wonderful, Anne," said Eve. "You combine intelligence, common sense, and industry with the broadest mind and biggest heart in the world."

"For heaven's sake," said Anne. "Don't! You sound as though you were about to deliver a lecture."

"So I am. On the blessedness of women like you. I wonder if Humphrey realises what a darling you are."

"I'm sure he doesn't. And I'm not a 'darling'—you foolish child."

"You're a damn good wife and mother, Anne."

"You're quite a good wife yourself, my dear, and if you have a baby you'll make a very good mother."

"I'm sure I shan't," said Eve, "and I'm a rotten wife to Michael. You know that. A discontented, selfish little beast."

Anne looked up from her work, dark eyes smiling.

"Don't get the inferiority complex, old thing. It doesn't do."

"I am inferior—to Michael."

"Mike's a dear, but you're quite a dear, yourself."

Eve flung her cigarette into the fireplace.

"Why do you believe in me, Anne? You've always been so nice to me. Yet you know I haven't been quite as . . . as you might have wanted Mike's wife to be."

"Rubbish," said Anne. "Mike's a darling, but he isn't as perfect as all that, and your faults are no worse than anybody's. I drive Humphrey to distraction—often."

"He adores you!"

"I sincerely hope not. I should hate to be adored. We never quarrel. But that's because I can't stand arguments, and never have 'em."

"Just like Michael," said Eve. "That's where you two are alike."

"All the Grahams were the same," said Anne. "It isn't a virtue, really. It's a type of cowardice. I can't face unpleasant discussions. My nerves won't stand them. I find one argues in a vicious circle and gets no further."

"I wish I felt like that. But oh, Anne, I do find the country a bit dull—do you think me horrible?"

"Certainly not. Some people like a quiet life. Others don't. But now, since Aunt Jane has excelled herself by leaving Mike all this cash, you'll move to town. You'll be all right then."

"I'm going to try and be the most marvellous wife in the world to Mike, in future."

"Go easy, old thing," said Anne. "Where you make the mistake is by starting off at fever-heat. You can never keep it up. Just be normal."

"Oh, wise woman!" Eve looked at her sister-in-law with hazel eyes that suddenly brimmed with tears. "Anne, you're the only girl I've ever met that I really respect."

Don't ever stop being nice to me and giving me good advice, whatever I do. I couldn't bear to lose you."

"Silly old thing," said Anne. "Aren't we sisters?"

"But just supposing . . ." Eve's face grew flushed and half-frightened. "Just supposing I ever did anything to really hurt Mike. You'd desert me, then."

"You're not going to do anything to hurt him. Why should you?" said Anne.

"But if I did," Eve persisted. "Would you give me up?"

"I honestly can't answer that," said Anne. "I can't imagine you hurting Michael badly, but if you did, I dare say I'd be furious with you."

"You—furious—it's difficult to picture," said Eve, looking into Anne's grave, beautiful eyes. "Anne, I'll try never, never to hurt Mike. But sometimes—try and understand this—I feel I ought never to have married. As though I—I can't settle down."

"You will in time, old thing. I felt like that once."

"You?" said Eve incredulously.

"Yes."

"But there's nobody for you except Humphrey and the kid."

"That doesn't prove that I've never wanted anything else; or that life has been entirely what I expected. Humphrey's a perfect dear and Paddy's adorable, but I assure you I'd rather spend my days in some really nice home of my own than be hounded by His Majesty's Army from pillar to post. But that's life, my dear—you do what you're told, not what you want. And it doesn't make it any better if you groan or howl!"

"O'n, Anne!" Eve laughed. "You're right. But sometimes it makes me feel better to howl."

"Howl away, then," said Anne. "Personally, it would bring me no comfort."

"It's this awful self-control that both you and Mike possess—it defeats me!" said Eve. Then she added: "I hope I shall have a baby soon."

"I hope so, if you want one," said Anne. "I wouldn't be without Paddy for anything, but I assure you, my dear, I'm not at all angelic about the producing of offspring. I think it's the most revolting affair, and men are so cheerful

about it. They look upon it all as 'Nature'—no matter what you go through."

"It does seem a bit of a mistake on Nature's part," said Eve. "But Mike does adore kids. . . ."

"Mum-my!" sang the voice of Miss Paddy Flaming from above. "I want you."

Anne rose, tongue in her cheek.

"That's what you'll have to put up with," she said.

"What does she want?" asked Eve.

"Nothing. It's only to get me up there."

"Let me come up with you," said Eve.

Paddy sat up with only a sheet round her; small face, arms, and legs covered in cold cream to take down the sting of sunburn after her day on the beach. "Now, Paddy—what do you want?" said Anne. "Auntie Eve is shocked because you've called me up these stairs."

"Wanna kiss my n'Uncle Mike," said Paddy solemnly.

"You can't, darling. He's busy," said Anne.

"What's bizzy?" asked Paddy.

"Well, working," said Anne. "He can't come, anyhow."

"Mummy," said Paddy, in a bright, new voice. "A boy lend me his spade on the beach."

"Yes, darling, I know. Now go to sleep."

"Mummy," said Paddy. "I putted water in my pail."

"Yes, darling—now go to sleep. Night-night."

"Night-night," said Paddy, lying down and shutting both eyes tightly.

"Good-night, sweetheart," said Eve.

"'Night, sweetart," said Paddy, then sat bolt upright again. "Aunt Eve—I had a cweam bun for my tea."

"Paddy, you *must* lie down and stop talking," said her mother firmly.

"But I had a cweam bun for my tea," said Paddy, in a grieved voice.

"I know, but——"

"I did have a cweam bun," protested Paddy, and suddenly flung herself back on the pillow and wept copiously.

Eve regarded her niece in dismay.

"Good Lord, Anne, what's she crying for?"

"Nothing," said Anne, looking the grim mother. "It's only just to be naughty," She advanced to her daughter's

small bed and leaned over it. "Now, Paddy, stop crying. You're being rather silly."

"But I had a cweam bun!" said Paddy, in a heart-rending voice.

"All right, darling. I know you did."

Paddy sat up. She ceased crying. She beamed.

"You didn't have one, Auntie Eve," she said. "An' Mummy didn't have one and n'Uncle Mike didn't have one and——"

"Paddy, if you don't stop talking, I shall have to beat you," said Anne.

Eve expected this to bring fresh tears from Paddy. But the threat of the beating from her mother tickled her sense of humour. She roared with laughter. Anne had to laugh. Eve shook her head.

"Damned if I understand kids."

"You will, when you've had one," said Anne. "Their minds work amazingly. Hello—here comes n'Uncle Mike."

Michael had seen his last patient, and was bounding up the stairs. His long, fair face looked flushed and happy.

"I'm for the mothers' meeting," he said. "Did I hear the voice of my naughty niece?"

Paddy rose in bed, and staggered over it with arms outstretched.

"My n'uncle," she shrieked ecstatically.

Anne put up her hands.

"That's done it. I give up trying to instil any sleep into the rabbit. Come on downstairs, and leave 'em to it, Eve."

Michael sat down on the bed. He took Paddy's small figure in the white cotton sleeping-suit into his arms. His fair head was pressed to her silky blonde one. She was quiet as a mouse now. He was murmuring things to her. Eve heard him.

"Little Jack Horner sat in a corner
Eating his Christmas pie.
He put in his thumb,
And pulled out a——"

"Plumb!" yelled Paddy, and shrieked with laughter.

"I believe you did it, and not little Jack Horner at all," said Michael.

Eve followed Anne down the stairs. She felt an almost painful contraction of her heart as she carried with her that vision of Michael and the child. He adored little children. His touch was magic to them. How he would adore one of his own.

"I *must* have one," Eve told herself. Then an awful thought gripped her. "Supposing I never have one. Some people don't. How awful it would be!"

After supper that night, she and Michael and Anne sat out in the little garden in deck-chairs. The stars glittered and winked over them. The trees were black, slim shadows, and the curving downs were mysterious and beautiful against the pale starlit sky.

Eve leaned back in her chair, dreamily watching a bat wheel and dip overhead. The curious blind panic of the little dark winged body intrigued her.

It was still and warm out here, this August night. She felt that it was one of the happiest nights she had had at Pear-Tree Cottage. She liked to see the red glow of Michael's cigarette when he drew a breath of it, and to listen to his low voice, telling her all that he meant to do up in London. There was a delicious anticipation about it all. A new life facing them.

Anne sat and smoked and talked with them, and in the magic of the starlight Eve thought that her sister-in-law's pale face, framed in soft dark hair, was the face of a madonna. How good and beautiful Anne was. She loved Anne. And in so many respects Michael was like her. Not so tactful, not so understanding, perhaps; a little clumsy and lacking in subtlety . . . but with all Anne's good points—her virtues, her selflessness, her exquisite quality of kindness.

She told herself that it was not because Michael had become suddenly rich that she liked him better, and was anxious to please him. She had felt the old desire to be happy with him while she was up in Poppy's flat, long before she had heard about Aunt Jane's money. She was glad—glad it was not the news of the money that had changed her. That would have made her feel a mean, mercenary sort of creature.

Michael suddenly put out a hand and took hers, played with her wedding-ring.

"I suppose you're just bursting with joy at the thought of leaving Ashingdon," he said.

"I can't say I'm sorry, Mike. Only I do love the little cottage and the garden."

"So do I," he said regretfully. "I've been jolly happy here. I can't say I love London."

"How much money shall we really have, darling?" asked Eve.

"I suppose, roughly, about £2,000 a year from Aunt Jane's money and our capital," said Michael. "My £200 a year as well, of course, and then whatever I make as a specialist."

"Which might be a lot if you become famous," said Eve. "And don't forget my little bit that Daddy gave me."

"I won't forget that," laughed Michael, squeezing her hand. "But that's yours. And I shall hope as a man of such wealth to make you a handsome allowance, my darling."

"How pompous you'll be!" said Eve.

"Never pompous—he couldn't be," said Anne. "In fact, I think he's almost sorry he's come into the money, because he wanted to work his own way up."

"Oh, don't you believe it. I'm jolly bucked to have £40,000 dropped into my lap," laughed Michael. "Only I would like to get to the top of the tree through my own efforts."

"So you will," said Eve. "But the money will just make things a bit easier."

"And much more amusing for you, sweetheart," he said. She could see the warm look in his eyes as he turned his face to her, and the pressure of his hand increased. She thought:

"He does love me. He is a darling, and I don't deserve it."

"Will you go to Harley Street?" asked Anne.

"No. I shall have to be more fashionable than that," he said. "A consulting-room in Queen Anne Street, I should think."

"And where shall we live?" asked Eve excitedly.

"What do you think?" said Michael. "Kensington? Knightsbridge? Chelsea?—I don't mind."

"I should adore one of those old houses in Chelsea," said Eve. "You'll have to buy one, won't you, Mike?"

"Yes, I daresay."

"I think it's rather splendid of you to go ahead, old boy," said Anne. "Many men coming into cash like this would just sit down and enjoy it, and throw up their job."

"I'm not going to throw up my babies," said Michael. "I only want to get rid of the grown-ups and their ailments, and concentrate on kids. They're so much nicer than adults."

"That's a compliment to us, Anne," said Eve.

"He's right," said Anne, smiling.

It struck Eve again, in that moment, what a dreadful thing it would be if she never had any children . . . for Michael.

She communicated this new terror to Michael that night when he was sitting on the edge of her bed, smoking his last cigarette. He seemed unconcerned.

"Oh, of course, we'll have a kid one day, darling. I shouldn't worry."

"But I'm terribly anxious now to have one, Mike."

"You're a darling thing," he said. He extinguished his cigarette and took her in his arms. She was in responsive mood, and drew the fair, untidy head down to her own. "I think this has been the happiest day I've had for years," he added boyishly. "You've been so sweet to me, Eve."

She hugged him close.

"Mike, we'll be so happy up in town."

"I hope you will be, sweetheart."

"And you'll have your consulting-room up there, and do your children's work."

"I hope so. I shall try and get a junior appointment on the staff at a children's hospital, for experience."

"And it's all settled. You'll start selling the practice right away," she said, with shining eyes.

"Yes. In a fashion I shall be sorry to desert it. I've been quite attached to it, and everybody in Ashingdon has been very decent to me."

"But it's absurd for a man with your talent to have a country practice," she said, a trifle impatiently.

He suddenly buried his face against her shoulder.

"Eve, I want you to be happy—I want to make you happy," he said, in a tone of unusual emotion.

"Darling, you do. I am," she said incoherently.

"Going up to Poppy hasn't made you come back feeling I'm an old bore?"

"No, of course not."

"Love me, darling," he said. "Love me. . . ."

His hands were fierce and possessive about her, his lips against her ear. She gave a little gasp, and held him tightly, caressing his thick fair hair. She was in the mood to be kind, to love him. But this was a Michael she had not known before; a Michael less shy and more passionate than usual, as though her home-coming and the news of his legacy had excited him—wakened some slumbering chord in him.

But under her love for him and her wish to make him happy, that maddening brain of hers would dissect . . . analyse . . . criticise. She was thinking:

"He is absolutely my lover . . . much more than any ordinary husband to an ordinary wife. Why, why, didn't he make love to me like this when we first went away—to Paris? I don't want ecstasies with Mike now. I did then. It's ghastly. But I don't now . . . it's too late."

She wanted to put on the light again, and sit up and talk to Mike about where they'd live in town and what they'd do and what fun it would all be. But Mike just wanted to lie here in silence with his head on her breast. How funny and irritating men could be, she thought—at least, men like Michael. Why must they always seek expression through the physical? A woman was quite willing to be awfully nice and friendly, and even affectionate, but for the man—this sort of thing must always be the climax.

It was real companionship that she and Michael lacked. The communion of the body was sufficient for him; perhaps he even felt that they were also one in mind. But she knew just how very far apart they were—mentally. It was all such a pity.

She only allowed herself to think of the immediate future. She dared not look too far ahead. She was not stupidly blind. She was sufficiently intelligent to realise that, once the novelty of the change to a home and practice in London had passed, she would find herself what she had been before—bored.

"I must have babies—heaps of 'em—quick," she told herself grimly. "Something to keep me out of mischief."

BOOK III

EVE AND NICHOLAS

CHAPTER I

SOME years later, one fine morning in Spring, Eve Graham walked down Regent Street to hunt for a birthday present for Michael, and ran into Lawrence Hammond.

Eve recognised him before he saw her. The slim, graceful figure and dark, satyr-face of the man were so unmistakable, although for five years she had neither seen nor heard of him.

She gripped his arm, and said :

" Lawrence ! Have you forgotten me ? "

He turned, and looked quickly at her.

" Good Lord, if it isn't Eve. My dear, how are you ? "

They shook hands warmly, and stood talking, interested in each other, completely detached from the world which hummed around them.

Eve was genuinely glad to see Hammond again. At one period of her life shortly after her marriage to Michael she had regretted the episode with Lawrence, and tried not to remember him. But after five years of matrimony, she had got over that exalted wish to be a model of perfection for Michael. She was a little bored with life just now, and it was rather " a thrill " to look at Lawrence Hammond and recall one or two very ardent and agreeable moments with him.

" You haven't changed a bit," she said. " A little thinner, perhaps. Are you still in Malma ? "

" No. The climate got me. I had to chuck the Far East. As a matter of fact, I've been in the States this last couple of years. A fellow I know asked me to go out there, and I saw a chance of making a bit of money, so I went."

"Oh, Lawrence, you're priceless," said Eve. "Are you frightfully rich now, and settling down in England?"

"Certainly not," said Hammond. "I'm very poor. Just started a chicken-farm down in Dorsetshire with the fellow who was in the States with me. We're having a lot of hard work, and it's very healthy, and when I'm bored with it I shall go off somewhere else."

"Aren't you lucky," said Eve. "That's the life to lead. Independence. No wife, no children, no ties."

Hammond regarded her critically.

"Come, come, my child. Have the years made you a cynic? By the way, I heard you were married. How's life treating you? I expect you've got a nice husband and heaps of children."

Eve's face, which had been flushed and sparkling, suddenly sobered. She drooped her eyelids.

"I've got a nice husband, but no children," she said abruptly.

"Look here, we can't stand here," said Hammond. "What about a cocktail somewhere? It's past twelve. Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere," said Eve. "But I don't want a cocktail. I'm just the same as I was, Lawrence. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. I cannot take strong liquor. Will you swoon if I suggest Fullers, which is close by, and coffee?"

"Excellent plan," said Hammond.

She laughed, then sighed. As they strolled into Fullers she looked back upon her brief and stormy affair with Hammond, and thought how childish, even pathetic, it had been. "I was much too intense," she thought. "I'm not a bit like that now. I feel horribly lethargic. *Bored*. It takes a lot to excite me."

When she was seated at a small table opposite Hammond, she looked at his thin brown face and saw that her first impression was a wrong one. He had aged. Several more years of a disastrous climate and chronic malaria had left marks—a number of tiny lines about the light grey eyes and the thin lips, grey hairs at the temples. She wondered why she had ever wanted him so inordinately.

"Well, what do you think of me?" she asked him.

"I don't know, quite," he said. "You're the same in a way, but of course you've altered a bit."

"Become an old hag, eh?"

"Old hag—at what? Twenty-five or six?"

"Nearly twenty-six," said Eve. "I've been married five years this January!"

"Dreadful," he smiled, handing her a cigarette. "You still seem a child to me."

"But not quite the foolish infant you used to know."

"I wonder," he said.

"Still horrid, Lawrence," she smiled.

"I really doubt if women ever cease to be foolish infants. Take it as a compliment, my dear. You've matured, of course."

"Got fatter," she sighed.

"Not too fat. . . ." He looked at the charming, rounded figure appreciatively. Eve had always had a beautiful figure. The full, amorous mouth was unaltered. Still discontented. She looked young for her twenty-six years, Hammond thought. "She's improved in looks enormously," he told himself. "Marriage has been good for her. And she seems to be well off."

"Tell me all about this husband of yours, and what you've been doing, and where you are," he said.

"Well, a lot of water has rolled under the bridge since we met, Lawrence," she said.

"I'm sure. First of all, are you really happy? I hope so."

Eve shrugged her shoulders. Was she really happy? Yes and no. More no than yes. What was there to be particularly happy about? A husband is a dull creature who thinks more of his work than of amusing his wife. She had her happy moments, of course. But to tell Lawrence she was really happy would be untrue.

She smoked her cigarette, and smiled at Hammond. He watched the movements of her slim pale fingers, and thought that her nails were too highly-polished and too red. This new Eve was a little artificial.

"Is one ever really happy?" she counter-questioned him.

"Probably not," he said. "But you ought to be. Aren't you in love with your husband? By the way, I don't even remember his name. Bobby did tell me. . . ."

"Graham," she said. "Michael Graham. And when

you ask me if I'm in love with him, my dear Lawrence—in love is the wrong expression. Surely that is only the effusion of extreme youth. I love Michael dearly. He's a perfect darling and frightfully good to me. But I've ceased to believe in any such thing as being in love."

"Dear, dear!" said Hammond, blinking. "This is awful. The Eve I knew was the most romantic child on earth."

"What a little idiot, too," she said, rather bitterly. "Don't I know it, now."

"I'm not sure you weren't nicer than you are now," he smiled.

"Yet you lectured me solemnly on my idiocy and told me to get hardened. Now I'm hard you don't like me."

"I like you immensely," he said. "You are and always have been a most attractive young woman. Thank goodness you're married and safely tied up."

"Safely!" she jeered. "How amusing. But really, Lawrence, now I've got hard, you don't like it."

"There are mediums," he said. "You women don't seem to be able to hit 'em. You want to be a little soft and a little hard. What have you been doing to become so blasé and cynical? I'll forgive you and understand if you tell me you're just fond of your husband but not in love with him. That's permissible and normal. But perhaps you have been indulging in affairs of the heart outside your home!"

"No, I haven't," said Eve. "I haven't had any affairs Lawrence. I've been too busy helping Michael in his career."

"That's as it should be—but you don't look to me like a young woman who can go through life without affairs. You're bored, Eve. That's what it is. Dangerous state. Someone will come along——"

"Oh, no," she broke in. "Oh, no. Don't you worry, Lawrence. That won't happen to me."

"A challenge to Fate," said Hammond. "I shall carry you off to my chicken-farm to-night."

"Dear old Lawrence," said Eve. "I'm almost tempted to say I'll come."

"It would be more than my life is worth, to take you," said Hammond. "Jimmy and I have sworn an oath to

keep our farm-house free from females. But look here, old thing, I'd honestly like to know all about you."

"Well, I'll tell you," she said. "I married Dr. Graham soon after you went back to the East, and I imagined life would be one long honeymoon, and I was disappointed. That's all."

"I'm sorry," said Hammond. "But if you're fond of each other—after all—you mustn't ask too much of life."

"I don't now. But I did. So as my illusions vanished one by one I got a bit hard."

"You want a new thrill to soften you down, my child."

"Probably," admitted Eve. "But I shan't get it. It's a bit difficult when one's husband won't settle down to the being 'just fond' stage."

"Ah!" said Hammond. "He's still in love with you, eh?"

"I'm afraid so," said Eve. She flushed, and jammed her cigarette-end rather fiercely against her plate. "I wish he wasn't. I'm not nearly good enough for him."

"H'm," said Hammond. He folded his arms and regarded her meditatively. She went on talking, and gradually he realised a little of the present state of affairs. This doctor husband appeared to be a quiet, good fellow, rather shy and unsociable, devoted to his work. Eve was the reverse.

"I was nearly frantic down in Ashingdon when Michael's aunt suddenly left him a lot of money," Eve told him. "Then we came up here. He's a specialist now."

"Of what?"

"Children," said Eve.

Then suddenly she looked up at Lawrence, and he was distressed to see her lip quivering.

"That's been the main trouble," she said, in a low voice. "Michael adores kids. He's made quite a name in town for the remarkable way he has of managing them. He wanted one of his own. I did, too—really more for his sake than mine. But we haven't had any."

"Oh, rotten luck," said Hammond. His face was grave and wholly sympathetic. To want children and not have them seemed a real tragedy. "But there's time."

"We've been married five years and not had any, so we're not likely to have one now," said Eve. "Michael's

awfully sweet—he scarcely ever speaks about it. He knows it is neither of our faults. Merely one of Nature's freakish cruelties."

"I'm damned sorry, my dear," said Hammond. "But, after all, you can be sure your husband must find compensation in the work he does for all these children."

"Oh, yes, in a way. But I wish we had one. It would give me a new interest," said Eve frankly. "One gets so tired of doing nothing."

"What do you do?"

"Go out. Play bridge. I belong to a club. I've got heaps of friends in town. Sometimes I give parties."

"I see," said Hammond. "Where does your husband work?"

"He's had a consulting-room in Queen Anne Street this last year, and done marvellously well. We're quite rich, Lawrence."

"That's something," he smiled. "You didn't like being poor in Ashington."

"No, I did not," she said. "It was ghastly."

"And how are your people?"

"The Poor Parents?" she laughed. "Oh, they haven't altered a scrap. Daddy still plants his roses and shoots his birds, and Mummy still finds a grievance."

"And that frightful young female, Poppy Crawford?"

"Poor Poppy." Eve bit her lip. "She's been through the mill, Lawrence."

"I thought she was heading for disaster."

"She got tangled up with that nasty playwright, Norman Roxley, and he let her down. Then she found another man—a fat Jew—some theatrical producer. He put her on the films. When I came to town she was living with this Jew, and trying to pretend she was enjoying life. I saw her for the first time for months the other day at a race-meeting, and she looked positively ghastly. She said she was dying of consumption."

"Poor Poppy," said Hammond. "She did ask for it, Eve. But I'm sorry!"

"You must come and see Michael," said Eve, changing the conversation.

"I'd like to, my dear. But I'm only in town until this afternoon. Then I go back to my chickens."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Eve sighed. She was enjoying this revival of her old friendship with Lawrence. He had always amused and interested her. She wanted somebody like Lawrence to talk to, badly.

"I'll look you up one day," he said. "And if ever you motor down my way, look us up."

"I will," she said. She glanced at her wrist-watch and gave an exclamation. "It's half-past one. I shall be late for lunch. And this afternoon I'm meeting my husband's latest protégé at tea-time. I must get back and change."

"What sort of protégé?"

"Oh, a young and extremely brilliant surgeon who is also interested in children. They met at a big children's hospital. Michael was there eighteen months on the junior staff. Now this surgeon, whose name is Rayne, proposes to start a practice and share Michael's consulting-room. He has a little money of his own and Michael says he will go a long way. He admires him awfully."

"Ah ha!" said Lawrence. "I see trouble ahead."

"What?"

"The seduction of a brilliant young surgeon by Mrs. Michael Graham."

"Don't be silly," said Eve. "If I have any affair at all, it isn't likely to be with Mr. Nicholas Rayne, F.R.C.S. I've had enough of the medical profession. Good-bye, Lawrence. It's been nice seeing you again."

"Awfully cheery, old thing," said Hammond. "Good-bye, and we'll meet again soon. Take care of yourself and go and be kind to your husband."

"Oh, yes," she laughed. Then she sighed, hailed a taxi, and drove home, wondering if Mr. Nicholas Rayne would be as dull as most of poor old Michael's friends.

The house in town which Michael had bought after the disposal of the Ashingdon practice was one of many in Bedford Gardens, Campden Hill. Quiet, dignified, oblong little houses with the quaint doors and square-paned windows of the Georgian days. Neat, compact houses; perhaps a little sombre, but full of delicious old-world

charm. Inside the mellowed walls of the little house which now belonged to Eve and Michael Graham, a purely modern note prevailed. Many antique chairs and tables, old prints, and the ancient Persian rugs which had graced the floors of Pear-Tree Cottage. But all that was antique had, in some queer way, faded into insignificance, outshone by modern splendour.

Eve had tried to create something of the effect of Toffee Marsden's studio . . . with black velvets, lurid paintings, heavily-shaded lights. Michael opposed nothing. The house looked charming and original, and if it rather puzzled him, he good-naturedly expressed himself satisfied with it.

At first Michael had no practice at all. He wanted to get experience before he set up as a specialist. He became clinical assistant at a big London children's hospital, and later slipped into a vacancy on the junior staff. It was absorbing work to him. To Eve it appeared rather a poor business. In her impulsive fashion she wanted him to rush to the top of the tree. But Michael preferred to climb slowly. Before he could do big things he felt that he must begin at the bottom.

His chance had come a year later through a well-known physician who had a consulting-room in Queen Anne Street, and was on the senior staff at the hospital where Michael had shown his mettle. This man asked Michael to look after his practice during the summer holidays. Michael did so. The big man never came back. He had died after a short illness in Italy. Michael Graham slipped into his place at the hospital as physician, and kept on the consulting-room in Queen Anne Street.

That had happened a year ago. To-day, Dr. Michael Graham was a busy man with every prospect of becoming a famous one. He had always had a magic touch with little children, and a wonderful love of them. Three months ago the small daughter of a well-known peer had been given up for lost by most of the older, better-known specialists and Michael had been called in as a last measure. The child was very weak and nervy; screamed when a doctor or nurse touched her. When Michael entered the room he did not examine the small patient at once. Instead, he made grave examination of all her toys, then told her stories. Before half an hour had passed the child was like

wax in his hands, and refused to let him leave her. He stayed with her for three days, using all his medical skill without letting her realise it. He saved her. The story went round London. From that day onward, Michael's name was made.

Eve knew that she ought to feel immensely gratified and proud of him. She was proud of him. But the wonderful Dr. Graham, who to the hysterical and terrified mothers of sick children was a demi-god, a saviour, remained to Eve the ordinary, quiet, slow Michael whom she had first loved and married. His success meant influential friends, money, plenty of entertainment, if she wanted it. But when the first flush of it had died down, things could only resume their normal complexion. Michael in his consulting-room was a magician and a personage. Michael in the little house in Bedford Gardens was—just a husband.

Eve had long since ceased to be passionately in love with him, or even to seek for entertainment in his company. She was inclined to think that he had grown even more quiet and self-contained since he had become a big man in his medical profession. He seemed to spend all his mental energy, his vitality, on his work, and had nothing left for her but a devotion, limitless but silent. It was a perpetual aggravation that Michael must only adore without proving it by countless acts of homage and many words. To her it seemed all so incomplete and unadorned. He would not shine; could not. He shrank from the public gaze. He refused to be photographed or fêted. If, in any party, he found himself becoming the centre of attraction as "the wonderful young man who was a specialist for children," he vanished rapidly. That irritated Eve beyond all words.

"Nobody would think you're as clever as you are," she cried at him one night, exasperated by the shyness he had exhibited at a dance. "You behave like a fool."

"I don't want people to think me clever," he had answered. "I hate publicity; let those who think me a fool think it. I really don't care."

Eve was almost in tears. To her, publicity was a thrilling and exciting thing. She *wanted* her husband to be popular, and to bask a little herself in the reflection of his glory. He made it impossible.

They rarely quarrelled these days. Eve had so many friends and amusements at her finger-tips that she had little time for brooding over her own grievances and disappointments, or letting them react upon Michael. Also, she was older, and with age comes a certain tolerance which youth does not know. She was bored with her husband, but he was nice and he loved her, so she was faithful to him.

The passionate side of Eve's nature had been in abeyance for some time. But recently, although she would never have admitted it to Lawrence Hammond or to anybody, she experienced a certain longing for the old wild thrill which she had felt, first with Lawrence and later with Michael. Sometimes, when she allowed herself to dwell on it, she wondered whether she would be content to ignore that side of herself for the rest of her life. And then, ashamed of herself for even visualising infidelity to Michael, she fled from the thought.

She was pleased because she had gathered a set around her of people both intelligent and entertaining. Theatricals were claiming her attention at the moment. She gave little "shows" in her drawing-room at the Bedford Gardens house. She encouraged people in the artistic professions to come to her home, enjoyed literary evenings, debates, which were really far beyond her own intellectual capacity, but which she pretended to understand and enjoy.

Michael had no part in these gatherings, and did not even pretend to like them. But he was happy to take a back seat and watch Eve enjoy her little triumphs. He liked her to be amused. To him it was a deep tragedy that their tastes lay so far apart, but he was much too dumb a creature to be able to tell her how he suffered, and missed the close companionship of their early days. Sometimes it was almost to Michael as though he were married to a stranger. The self-possessed, *soignée*, lovely young woman of to-day seemed so far removed from the childish, impulsive Eve who had walked across her father's shoot beside him, and been in need of his protection and his love. She seemed in need of nothing that he could offer her to-day.

The money he was earning, coupled with the interest from his aunt's legacy, enabled him to give his wife everything she wanted, within reason. Their house ran on oiled wheels in the care of three efficient servants—a

cook, a housemaid, and a butler. Lately they had discussed leaving Bedford Gardens and taking a larger house. But so far nothing definite had been arranged.

The one real friend of Eve's life remained her sister-in-law, Anne Flaming. But, unfortunately, she never saw enough of Anne. Humphrey Flaming had not been posted abroad again after his promotion, but he had gone to Spike Island, a long way from London, which meant that Anne only saw her brother and his wife at rare intervals.

Eve rarely came in contact with Michael's colleagues. Occasionally one or two of the big doctors and their wives dined at the little house in Bedford Gardens, but Eve did not find herself often in what she called an "*ethereal*" medical circle.

She was a little bored with the thought of meeting and entertaining Michael's new friend, Rayne. Doctors did not amuse her. Rayne was supposed to be a clever young surgeon on the staff at Michael's hospital. He was himself very interested in children's work—the right person to share Michael's consulting-room. To Eve, Nicholas Rayne sounded rather like a second Michael. She thought Mike was rather generous to let Rayne share the room in Queen Anne Street. It would be a very good thing for Rayne. He would be called in as consulting surgeon to many of Michael's big cases.

"He's a charming fellow—a fine surgeon—keen as mustard," Michael told Eve last night. "I want you to be nice to him, darling. He ought to interest you. He's an artistic sort of fellow. Plays the piano well."

Eve said: "H'm."

Michael's idea of a piano well played was not hers.

Michael added:

"I'm sure you'll like him. He's got a curious personality, Quite dynamic. Only twenty-eight. He'll do big things if he'll settle down. He's alone in the world, and, as far as I can make out, pretty lonely."

"Well, don't suggest that he should live in our house as well as share your consulting-room," was Eve's final remark.

"I wouldn't dream of suggesting it," Michael replied. "But you meet him, Eve. I'll bring him back to tea to-morrow and you shall see what you think of him."

So at last Eve was to meet Nicholas Rayne.

She lunched alone ; a faultless little meal of soup, chicken patties, *soufflé*, served by the manservant, Parkes, who was an excellent butler of the old school.

" I want tea at half-past four, Parkes," Eve told him after lunch. " The master will be home and one guest."

" Very good, madam," said Parkes.

Eve lit a cigarette, and wandered into the drawing-room to see if the fire was alight. It was still chilly on the early afternoons of March. Yes, of course. Parkes never forgot anything. The fire burned merrily. It was a very charming drawing-room—two rooms in one. The folding doors between were kept permanently open. In sunny weather it was a very bright room because there were windows at both ends. The parquet flooring had that nice dark-gold polish of age. Against pale-cream walls hung three or four oils framed in very delicate frames of palest gilt ; brilliant little modern paintings which Eve and Michael had brought back from Paris. Several exquisite pieces of old china on the mantelpiece ; a Chippendale table near the window bearing some lovely modern glass ; a Lalique bowl with a translucent design of mermaids ; two or three low arm-chairs covered in blue and amber silk stuff ; a huge sofa spread with cushions. Against one gold cushion sprawled a doll—a masterpiece which had come from Venice. It looked almost human with its long pale face, almond eyes, and amorous red mouth.

On the left of the fireplace in the front room there was a Chippendale bookcase ; several odd, antique chairs. In the back portion of the room between the windows, an exquisite serpentine chest of satinwood, bearing one or two pieces of old silver and two long, slender candles of ebony wax. And of course Eve's piano, always open ; and Eve's gramophone.

A fascinating room full of incongruities. Eve loved it. It was her room. And she felt sometimes that she was growing like her Venetian doll—bored ; nothing much to do but to sprawl among the huge cushions and look beautiful.

" I wonder what I want out of life," she asked herself.

She stared at her reflection in a little mirror from the bag she carried. Made a *moué*.

She went up to her bedroom to rest before she changed. She had a separate bedroom from Michael, now. He had been very hurt when she had suggested it. She made the excuse that she was nervy, and hated sleeping in a room where anybody else breathed and snorted and sighed. But she knew that the real reason why she had wanted a separate room was because she had found that sharing a room with one's husband encouraged intimacies, and she no longer wanted them. She sometimes wished ironically that Michael were her brother instead of her husband. She felt she could have been so much fonder of him if he had been her brother.

She had grown hard. Yes, decidedly. Six months ago she had asked Michael to buy her a platinum wedding-ring instead of the gold one with which he had married her.

"Gold rings look absolutely dowdy, Mike," she said. "Do let me change mine for a platinum one."

"But your wedding-ring—darling—surely, it's sacred—you can't want to change it," he protested.

"Oh, but I do, you silly old sentimentalist," Eve laughed. "Honestly, all my nice new platinum rings look frightful with that broad gold band."

Michael was very hurt and quiet about it. At first he refused to let her make the change and put the gold ring away. Finally, in the face of persistent jeers and requests, he surrendered. Eve had her platinum wedding-ring.

"If it doesn't matter to you, why should it matter to me?" he said, rather bitterly.

"It doesn't alter my affection for you," she said. "You men are funny."

3

At half-past four, after her rest and bath, she was in her drawing-room, walking up and down restlessly, smoking, waiting for Michael and his friend.

She stood at the window and watched the swift shadows gather in the street. The short March afternoon waned and very soon the street lamps gleamed, melancholy beacons in the London dusk.

Then a big Crossley saloon purred down Bedford

Gardens—Michael's car. They had the Crossley and a chauffeur now for town work, and Eve also had a two-seater Sunbeam for her own use. A minute later she heard voices on the stairs. Michael's familiar self-conscious laugh. He had not lost that funny shyness of his in all the years.

He came into the drawing-room with his friend. Michael, unchanged—tall, fair, flushed, unlined; perhaps more smartly groomed these days; morning coat; well-creased trousers; fair hair still rough. Michael would never have tidy hair. Eve scarcely looked at him. She said:

"Hello, Mike."

She looked at the man who had come with him. And at once the feeling of lassitude, of discontent, and boredom dropped from her. She became alert, vigilant. For here was a man with a face that intrigued and interested. One whose personality immediately impressed itself upon her. He was unlike any man Michael had ever brought to the house before.

"You are Mr. Rayne," she said, holding out her hand.

"Yes, this is Rayne," said Michael.

"How do you do?" said Nicholas Rayne, taking Eve's hand.

"Do sit down," said Eve.

"And have a cigarette," said Michael.

"May I walk round?" said Rayne. "I hate sitting down. Mrs. Graham, will you think me mad if I stroll round your room and examine everything? I've got a passion for looking at things."

She caught his smile, and was curiously elated by it. It was a very disarming smile which crinkled up the corners of his eyes and tilted his lips. He had a funny, faun-like mouth, she thought, narrow secretive lips; when they turned up in that sudden smile they seemed to say a whole host of things, and reveal all his funny, amusing secrets.

He was a very restless person. Hands in his trousers pockets, he walked up and down . . . up and down . . . eagerly looking at all the things. He seemed to like her golden room. He made her feel that he knew her very well; knew this golden room and these things of hers very well, too. Dynamic, Michael had called him. That

described Nicholas Rayne. He glowed with a kind of inward fire. He was an enthusiast. Not too blatantly so. He had a very quiet voice. But the under-current of excitement was there; burning interest in everything—everybody.

Eve sat down beside her Venetian doll. Michael stood by the fireplace, silent as usual, listening to his friend and his wife talk. The conversation was entirely between these two. Rayne looked at the books and liked them, and liked the French oils, the effect of the golden-shaded lamps lit up against the pale walls, and the big Lalique vase full of wine-coloured tulips which stood on the piano.

"It's all lovely," he said. "A dream of a room. You like Lalique? So do I. In a few years' time his stuff will be valuable. There's no one to touch him in modern art so far as glass is concerned. This is a spring room—full of sunshine——"

He broke off, laughing.

"I talk much too much. Stop me, Mrs. Graham. Your husband has to tell me to shut up in hospital—frequently."

"Indeed, I don't," said Michael. "Talk away, Rayne."

"Yes, do," said Eve.

By the time Parkes came in with the tea, Rayne had seen everything in the room. He opened the bookcase; looked through a volume of poems.

"Herrick. Marvellous. Nothing to beat him. Don't you love his 'Julia'? Is this your Herrick, Graham?"

"No, it's my wife's," said Michael. "I'm no lover of poetry. But Eve knows a lot about it."

"Do you?" Rayne swung round to Eve. "I like it immensely. And you play? Graham told me so. You must play to me."

"I know so little. But you know a lot. It is you who must play to me."

He did not refuse or exhibit any false modesty. He said swiftly:

"Of course I will."

It was delicious, with a complete absence of conceit. He was entirely natural. She had never known a more natural person.

She was as much intrigued by his face as by his volcanic personality. Very pale—his face was almost of an ivory whiteness. Later, when she knew him better, she found that he never had any colour even when he grew excited or hot. His hair was thick, straight, black, growing low on an intelligent forehead, brushed smoothly, and parted on one side. Rather a narrow jaw and chin, the faun-like lips that had first claimed her attention, and the most brilliant eyes she had ever looked into. Dark brown—almost black—sparkling under straight, narrow brows.

Eve thought him extraordinarily handsome. He was a little short. Michael was a good two inches taller. But Rayne had a slim, supple figure, and moved so gracefully that he looked taller than he was. Not unlike Lawrence Hammond's figure. There was just a faint something about him that reminded Eve of Hammond. But Nicholas Rayne was years younger, and Lawrence had none of the vivacity, the amazing vitality, that flowed from Rayne continually, yet left him tireless.

During tea they had a vigorous conversation about art, music, books, and people. Michael put in a word here and there. Now and then Rayne turned to him and said :

"What do you think, Graham?"

On one occasion Michael, his mild eyes fixed on Eve, said :

"You'd better ask Eve. She's the brains of this family."

Rayne laughed, and looked at Eve.

"Your husband is much too modest, isn't he, Mrs. Graham?" he said.

"I'm always telling him so," said Eve. "I wish you would wake him up, Mr. Rayne."

"He doesn't want much waking up," said Rayne. "He's the keenest man in the profession."

"But outside the profession——" Eve stopped and bit her lip.

Rayne gave her a quick glance—gave Michael another, and suddenly wondered how things were between these two.

"Graham's wife is beautiful," he thought. "And extremely young. I wonder if she loves him. One can't tell. Modern women don't exhibit their feelings. But it's quite obvious that he's in love with her."

It rather astonished him to find Graham with such a wife. He had the greatest admiration for him as a doctor, knew

him to be a man of integrity. Somehow he had anticipated that Graham would have a wife as worthy as himself, and a little dull and dowdy. He could not have explained why he had thought this. But such had been the case. Instead, he found this extremely attractive girl, who, without being brilliantly clever, was quick and amusing, and had undeniable charm.

Nicholas Rayne drew his narrow black brows together and stared at the floor. She was so unlike Graham; so much more alive. It was strange how Fate paired off opposites like this. So often one found it. A beautiful, brilliant woman, a dull man; or a brilliant man and a quiet, stupid little woman. These two had nothing in common. Nicholas Rayne was sure of it. Graham was a dear lovable fellow. But he was like a big awkward schoolboy. Eve sparkled delightfully, was delightfully responsive, delightful to look at. Graham just sat and smoked and watched.

"Come and play to us, Mr. Rayne," said Eve.

He extinguished his cigarette and got up.

"If you'd like me to."

Eagerly she moved the tulips from the piano and opened the lid. She felt extraordinarily happy. She had not enjoyed an afternoon at home more than this for long months.

Rayne sat down and ran his fingers through his hair—a gesture soon to become familiar with her. He gave her one of his swift smiles.

"What shall I play?"

"Anything," she said.

"Do you know John Ireland's lovely thing—the 'Island Spell'?"

"No. Play it to me."

He ran his fingers over the keyboard. Eve returned to her sofa, sat down, lit a cigarette, and watched him. Michael sat opposite her, filling his pipe. She did not look at him. She was conscious only of the graceful figure on the piano-stool, Rayne's white poetic face flung back a little while he played.

The moment he began to play she knew that he was a born musician. He had a sympathetic touch that appealed to her. While she thought about him, she recollected

almost with a sense of shock that this man was a doctor. But how utterly different from Michael! He was supposed to be a very good surgeon too. She looked at the slim pale hands of the man—artistic hands. So unlike the broad palm, the spatulate fingers, of Michael. Not the powerful hand of the ordinary surgeon. It was hard for her to think of Nicholas Rayne with a scalpel in those sensitive, artist's fingers.

Eve forgot to smoke. The cigarette burned to long ash between her fingers. Her gaze was riveted on the face of the man who played. She felt that she was being bewitched by the music and by the wizard who was weaving the spell.

When Rayne lifted his hands from the keys he swung round on the stool and smiled his queer faun-like smile.

"Like that?" he said, in a nonchalant voice.

"Thanks very much, Rayne," said Michael politely. But he had thought the music a little barbaric and strange. Personally he liked a good tune—a nice march, for instance, that one could beat time to.

Eve said nothing. She just sat there. She was speechless. "The Island Spell," and the way Rayne had played it, had hurt her inexplicably; roused all kinds of queer regrets and longings, then left a feeling of tense depression.

Rayne looked at her, one brow raised. He was more faun-like than ever when he cocked that left eyebrow.

"I'm afraid you hated it," he said.

Then Eve said, in a low, breathless voice:

"Oh, no—I adored it. I—it's simply shattered me. I don't know why."

"It is a shattering thing. I know exactly what you mean. I'm glad you like it," he said.

Their eyes suddenly met. They understood each other. And Rayne knew, in a flash, that Eve Graham was not hard or ultra-modern. She was human. She could *feel*. He saw that she was quite pale and that her eyes were full of tears.

"God, she's got temperament, and she's unhappy," he thought. "She oughtn't to be married to Graham at all. What disaster!"

Then he took his gaze from her and turned back to the piano, and began to play a wild Russian gipsy dance. Eve's

mood changed with it, as he knew it would. Her colour returned. The tears dried on her lashes. She began to walk up and down the room, moving a little with the abandon of the music, one hand on her hip. She felt that she would like to dance with him. He would move perfectly. Music and poetry and Rayne were one. Her mind was curiously excited. There was something about Rayne that excited her in more ways than one. She found him mentally appealing, physically disturbing. With a little indrawn breath, a little quiver of the heart, she visualised herself in his arms, dancing with abandon to a wild Russian tune such as he was playing now.

Then, suddenly, like a douche of cold water on her heated imagination, came Michael's quiet deep voice.

"I say, Rayne, I've got to go to the hospital at six. Are you coming?"

Rayne got up from the piano stool, and took a cigarette from his case. He did not look at Eve.

"Oh—the hospital at six, eh? Right-oh, Graham, and thanks very much. You might drop me at my digs."

Eve said, on an impulse:

"Won't you come back and dine? Mike and I would be delighted."

Rayne glanced at Michael, who said:

"That's an idea. Yes, do join us."

"It's awfully nice of you both," said Rayne.

Eve's heart leaped. So he would. He would come back to dinner. She felt ridiculously pleased. They would have a wonderful evening. More wonderful music. She felt glad she had not arranged anything else for to-night.

Parkes came into the room.

"You are wanted on the telephone, please, sir."

When he had gone, Eve sat on the sofa, but Rayne walked up and down in his restless fashion.

"He's a live wire," she thought. "I've never met anything so vital."

"Where are your digs?" she asked him.

"Earl's Court. Loathly hole. I've been meaning to move for ages, but my landlady looks after me like a mother and cooks decently, so, because of that, I've put up with a ghastly Victorian sitting-room and no piano."

"No piano—you! But that's unthinkable."

"I haven't done without one for very long. My mother only died six months ago. While she was alive I lived with her. We had a flat in Chelsea. But I couldn't afford to keep it on when she died."

"Michael told me you were in digs. It must be so lonely for you."

"It is at times. I miss my mother a good bit. She and I were tremendous pals."

She looked at him with sympathy.

"Rotten luck."

"She was half-Italian," he said with one of his sudden revealing smiles. "And sang divinely. Even at sixty she could still sing."

Half-Italian. She might have known there was Southern blood in Nicholas Rayne, somewhere.

Rayne went on talking to her as he strolled up and down, only pausing to put his cigarette-ash in the tray on one of the tables. He told her quite a lot about himself and his position—the annuity his mother had had stopped at her death. He, himself, had less than £700 a year. But he wanted to do big things as a surgeon.

"I can't quite think of you as a doctor," Eve said, shaking her head. "You're so—different from most of them. You have missed your vocation. Surely you should have been a musician."

"Oh, no. I'm not nearly good enough for that. Besides, when my father, who died when I was nineteen, suggested the medical profession for me, I slipped into it quite happily."

"And you are like Michael. I mean in your love of children's work."

"Yes, kids are ripping. But I shall never be as good with them as Graham is."

"You may be better. Anyhow, he isn't a surgeon."

"But he's marvellous as a physician. I admire him tremendously."

"Most people do."

"It will be jolly nice sharing that room in Queen Anne Street with him. Honestly, I owe an awful lot to your husband. He's been very decent to me at the hospital. It was through him I got on the junior staff."

"Michael admires you," said Eve.

"Well, I don't know why," said Rayne.

"Where will you live when you leave your digs?" she asked abruptly.

"God knows," he said. He paused in front of her; looked round the room. It was warm and fragrant and full of hazy, amber light. "Graham's a lucky chap to have a room like this to come back to."

"You like it so much?"

"It's adorable," he said.

She looked a moment up into the dark glowing eyes of the man. And suddenly she made up her mind to suggest to Michael that Nicholas Rayne should come and stay here with them for a while. A foolish idea. He was much too attractive. He attracted her—vitally. But wasn't that what she had been missing—what she was wanting? A kindred spirit. A little of the champagne of life.

"I'm mad," Eve thought. "It would be frightfully dangerous to have him here. I'm much too intrigued with him, and he likes me."

She wondered whether there was a woman in his life. There must have been many in the past if there wasn't one now. No man with that quality of brilliance which he possessed, or that handsome Byronic head, could lead an existence without love, passion, sex-excitement. She imagined she knew men fairly well now. And the very way Nicholas Rayne looked at her . . . well, his eyes were not the eyes of a man who is disinterested in sex.

Life became suddenly enthralling to Eve.

Then Michael came back into the room, and took Nicholas Rayne from her.

4

Nicholas dined with the Grahams that night. It was a very pleasant meal—particularly pleasant after months of his somewhat dreary and lonely rooms in Earl's Court. Of course, he went out occasionally with colleagues from the hospital. He also had an aged aunt in Hampstead whom he dutifully visited. And he knew Mary Caley, the wife of one of the doctors who worked at the children's

hospital. Nicholas liked Mrs. Caley. She played the violin, and that appealed to him ; added to which she was cheerful, intelligent, capable of making a thoroughly good friend to a lonely bachelor. There weren't many women like that. Nicholas had found only too many women ready to be made love to. But friendship was rare, and Mary Caley's delightful house in Wimpole Street was always open to him. She was a busy woman, full of social engagements, and Nicholas did not care to foist himself too often upon the Caley household and their friends.

He was a man of extreme moods. As is so often the case with highly-nervous, temperamental people, he could either soar suddenly to infinite heights or sink to extreme depths. He also had periods of what he called "going mad," when, in a burst of super-energy and enthusiasm, he needed the close companionship and love of women. At such times the quiet practical friendship of such a woman as Mary Caley was useless to him. He wanted something, somebody, as volcanic, as irrational as himself.

He did not want to marry yet. He had not enough money on which to live luxuriously with any woman, and he knew he could only be happy if he could give his wife everything she wanted. At the same time, he was not at all certain that he could ever remain faithful to one woman under any conditions. He was inclined to think it impossible. He was weak where an attractive or beautiful woman was concerned ; particularly when he met one who appealed both to his body and his æsthetic tastes.

As a young medical student he had had one or two stormy affairs which had ended abruptly, and left nothing but a nasty taste in his mouth. Later, when he had calmed down, grown older and somewhat wiser, he had become more controlled. He had learned that it does not do for a man in the medical profession to be anything but controlled.

During his mother's lifetime he had only very rarely strayed from the fold, but of course he had had his "mad periods." There had been one woman in particular in his life, soon after Mrs. Rayne's death—a little Chelsea art-student. A small slender girl who wore her black satin hair in a straight fringe, and had huge, intense brown eyes. She had met Nicholas at a party and fallen madly in love with him. Nicholas, temporarily interested, lived with

her for a month. But of course it had ended in disaster. Baba had the temper of a little fiend, and Nicholas had one to match when he was roused. They quarrelled, and parted for good.

There had been nobody in his life since Baba, and for a long time he had not wanted an affair.

Eve Graham was an attractive and interesting proposition. She was very charming to him that night, and they had some music together. She sang some of her French songs with an interpretation and musical taste that both surprised and pleased him. Altogether she was a surprising and pleasing person. When Eve wanted to make herself agreeable to a man she was very agreeable. She dazzled Nicholas Rayne a little. She had youth, beauty, and gifts; and she spread them all before him in her sudden enthusiastic fashion which he recognised was not unlike his own. He could not help liking her. He was experienced enough with women to see through her little artifices and poses. But they amused him. And her very real intelligence was a delight. Beauty and brains are always a strong combination. Nicholas had known so many women who had either one or the other. He had never come into contact with a girl who had Eve Graham's physical attractions and was at the same time a person of intellect.

Nicholas Rayne left the house in Bedford Gardens that night feeling a little sad about the Grahams. He liked them both so much, each in their way. He was sorry that things were not more of a success. Graham was a dumb, reticent man, undoubtedly suffering in his silent way from an inferiority complex where his wife was concerned. And she was bored and aggravated—a common enough condition for any wife, but a tragedy, since she had the capacity for enjoying life to the full. Nicholas did not think she had ever been given the real chance to enjoy it.

He went away bearing a memory of her—slim, beautiful, seductive, in a frock of pale gold tissue with a huge golden flower on one shoulder; pale throat, lovely dimpled arms and drooping, scarlet mouth. Just a word, a look, suggestion here and there of her boredom and discontent. Just a flicker of long black lashes and a sudden, provocative look—almost a wistful one. A look that said:

"Come and amuse me. I do so want to be thrilled."

Now, Nicholas Rayne was not out to amuse and thrill married women. He had always regarded the young unhappily mated woman as a menace. But there was something soft and appealing in Graham's wife that he found irresistible. Within a few moments of speaking to her, gathering her views and ideas about life, he had discovered the incurable romanticist that dwelt under Eve's veneer of cynicism. He was immensely sorry for her. At the same time he was a little afraid of being too sorry.

"I don't think I shall go to the Grahams' house often," he mentally decided. "It wouldn't do."

He knew his own volcanic, responsive nature only too well. He could be perfectly good friends with a woman like Mary Caley. But he did not think he could ever be friends with Eve.

At the hospital that next day, Michael said:

"You must come and see us often, Rayne. My wife thoroughly enjoyed that music of yours, and it's awfully good for her. She doesn't get much of it. I'm afraid I'm not much encouragement. But do drop in and make her sing again like she used to."

Nicholas felt almost embarrassed.

"It's very decent of you, Graham. Thanks very much," he said. "I will."

But he did not go to the house in Bedford Gardens for several days. Then, one morning, Eve rang him up.

"Didn't Michael tell you to come along and have some music whenever you liked?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," said Nicholas. "Thanks most awfully, Mrs. Graham."

"Well, do come," came the clear, soft voice which he had found very charming. "What about this evening? We shall be at home."

He hesitated, then accepted the invitation. After all, why not? He did enjoy the music. And wasn't it being rather weak and stupid to anticipate any danger? After all—damn it—she was the wife of his friend. He wasn't going to make love to her. He didn't for a moment suppose she wanted him to. Why should he not go to the house? Graham had asked him to.

"I'd love to come, Mrs. Graham," he said.

"Splendid," said Eve. "Drop in any time you like after seven."

Rayne hung up the receiver and returned to work.

The evening was as enjoyable as he had anticipated. He played; Eve sang. She was friendly and charming. Michael was silent, as usual. Eve seemed to take little notice of him. It was Nicholas who made frequent attempts to draw him into their conversation. But Michael had nothing much to say, so it was difficult.

Then, at ten o'clock, Michael was called out on an urgent case. Nicholas spent an hour alone with Eve.

They gave up music. Sat and talked, and smoked innumerable cigarettes. Eve wore black velvet, which made her very slender, a tight collar of pearls round her throat, and two orchids on her shoulder. He enjoyed looking at her.

She told him a lot about herself this evening—her old life at Haywards Heath with her people; her meeting and marriage with Michael; their two years at Ashingdon. Nicholas listened with interest. Very soon he was on his feet, walking up and down in his restive way, talking to her.

"It was very young for you to marry," he said. "Twenty. You were a child. You're a child now."

"Twenty-six—that's old," she laughed.

"Wait till you're my age," he said. "I'm twenty-eight."

"A small boy," she jeered.

"I think not." He ran his fingers swiftly through his thick black hair. "But it was young for marriage—just out of your teens."

"When d'you think a woman should marry?"

"Not until she's seen something of life."

"But it's so hard for women to see a lot of life without getting married."

"That's a fallacy. Girls to-day do what they want and go where they like."

"Not with Victorian parents behind them."

"You must have been a good little girl," his black eyes sparkled at her.

"I—good! Oh, no! At least, not in my mind. Only because I was cowardly. Or because I lacked opportunity to be otherwise."

"You—with no opportunities. I can't imagine that," he said.

Her eyes opened wide and her cheeks burnt. She was flattered by the compliment, but at the same time she remembered, not without a sense of humiliation, the rebuff she had received at Lawrence Hammond's hands. But she was not going to make the mistake with Rayne that she had made with Lawrence. The whole conversation was bordering on the dangerous. She was sensible enough to talk about something else.

But of course, Rayne, man-like, wanted to know more, and hear more sincerities from her. After a while he drew the conversation back to herself.

"You think it is possible to marry when very young and make a success of it?"

"I don't think marriages are a success at any age," she said.

"Ah—that's cynical."

"Isn't it true? Why aren't you married?"

"Can't afford it."

She looked at him doubtingly.

"I wonder if that's the real reason."

"What do you think the real reason is?" he asked. His brilliant eyes and his faun-like lips smiled at her.

She met his gaze quite squarely.

"I think the real reason is because you know that very few men and women are capable of adoring each other for ever and wanting nothing else out of life."

"H'm," said Nicholas. "You may be right. On the other hand, really sensible people don't start by adoring each other. That's a mistake, in the first place."

"Are people ever sensible?" she parried.

"No," he said, and flung back his head and laughed. "Never. At least not the amusing people, thank goodness."

She laughed with him. But inwardly she was thinking:

"How frightfully right he is. Mike is a sensible man from every point of view, and so he's frightfully unamusing."

"Don't you think it's the duty of the human creature to be amusing," Nicholas asked her, "that the greatest crime one can commit is to bore someone else?"

"I agree with you—absolutely," she said.

Then he caught the note of bitterness in her voice, and frowned hard. He had no right to talk so intimately to Eve Graham. He knew, although she never once said so, that Graham bored her. And Graham was the best of fellows.

"This won't do," thought Nicholas. "In another moment I shall be flirting with Graham's wife, and it isn't fair."

And if Eve had attempted to flirt with him, then, he would have gone away for good, which might have been much better for everybody's sake. But she was growing clever with men these days. Subconsciously she saw her own danger.

Again she changed the conversation.

She said abruptly:

"Oh, by the way, it's Mike's birthday on Sunday. Will you come to the party I'm giving for him? We might have a cheery evening—play charades or something. Anyhow, you must come, and you shall be made to play soft music to suit the occasion."

Nicholas Rayne lit another cigarette; his straight black brows still drawn together. He had meant not to see too much of Eve Graham, and here he was, being raked in for a party on Sunday. He could get out of it if he wanted, of course. But——

"By the way, can't you bring your violinist friend, Mrs. Caley?" Eve broke in on his reverie.

His brow cleared.

"That's awfully nice of you. Mary would like to meet you."

"Is she very nice?"

"An absolute dear. Wonderful musician and linguist, and has been absolutely charming to me since I was a young medical student. I've known her for years. I tell her that she's one of the few women in the world who has a nose that is permanently pink, a sniff, a foul temper, and at the same time a distinct charm, and an unlimited number of friends."

"I think I shall like her," said Eve. "But will she like me?"

"Of course," said Nicholas.

Gs

"Then will you bring her on Sunday?"

"Thanks awfully. I'll ask her to come," he said.

"Oh, restless individual—do come and sit down!" she exclaimed, laughing at him.

He balanced himself on the edge of her sofa, and lifted her Venetian doll into his arms. He looked quizzically from the doll to Eve, slim and lovely in her black velvet dress.

"Mother and daughter," he said.

"Heavens—am I *that's* mother?" she said.

"No. You're *that's* daughter. It looks years older than you. But there's a resemblance."

They both laughed. Eve watched Nicholas' long pale fingers play with the doll's hair and necklace. And suddenly, quite madly and idiotically, she wished that those sensitive fingers were caressing *her* hair and *her* pearls.

"I'm crazy," she thought, alarmed at her own thoughts. "I'm Mike's wife. I ought to be ashamed of myself."

She got up. She was ashamed. But she found Rayne a most disturbing young man. There was some kind of electricity in him that communicated itself to her. Abruptly she put a Bach record on her gramophone.

When Michael came home, he found them vigorously discussing Bach.

CHAPTER II

I

ONE night, about three months later, Michael walked into his wife's bedroom to bid her good-night. A trifle wistfully he looked at her. She was charming to look at—black *crêpe-de-chine* pyjamas and a black lace boudoir-cap. A small, lissom figure, huddled up on top of the big divan bed. The May night was close and she had not yet got into bed. She was reading.

Eve was still beautiful and mysterious to her husband. Almost too mysterious. He knew so little about her, these days. At times, her body was his to hold, to caress . . . but her mind never was, never had been, really his. Less so now than ever. He rarely had any intimate talks with her.

To-night something made him linger by her bedside. As a rule he just kissed her good-night and went into his own bedroom, which was next door. A rather Spartan room, typical of Michael, austere Georgian with its tall-boys and bow-fronted chest of drawers and single bedstead with Chippendale head and foot.

"Well, darling," he said. He coughed and sat down on the edge of Eve's exotic bed.

She yawned and looked up from her book.

"Goo' night, Mikey."

"Is that all?"

She gave him a swift look. As a rule he did not demand more. She felt quite amiable toward him. In her way, she had never lost her fundamental affection for Michael.

"What else do you want?" she laughed.

"Nothing." Then suddenly his arms were round her and his fair, untidy head on her shoulder. "Though I always want you, sweetheart."

Her figure stiffened, and her whole face froze. A peculiar hard little look came into her eyes.

"Silly old thing," she said, and put a careless hand on his hair.

He kept his face hidden on her neck.

"Eve, sometimes I get awfully depressed."

"You?" she asked, surprised. "But why?"

"Because I feel we're so terribly apart."

"That's rot," said Eve.

"But we are," he persisted. "I scarcely ever seem to see you."

"Oh, you do!" she argued. "Michael, *darling*, what on earth is it? You don't want to make a scene, do you?"

"I don't generally make scenes," he said. Now he sat up and she was astonished and not a little embarrassed to see that his mild blue eyes were full of tears. She could not bear to think Michael was really unhappy. She had never realised that he was. At the same time she felt powerless to comfort him. She did not want to make love to him. Far from it. She dreaded that he might ask her to make some kind of response to his love. It would be very difficult if Michael was going to become demanding. It would be a catastrophe. Either she would have to act a part or hurt him, very badly, by telling him that she did not want him as a lover any more.

"Mike, what is it, dear? Do tell me," she said. He sat staring at the floor in a brooding fashion. She could no longer see the tears in his eyes, but knew that they were still there. She reached out a hand and held it on his arm.

"Mike, what is it?" she repeated.

He turned and looked at her.

"I don't quite know. Except that I feel, more to-night than I've felt for a long time, that I love you, Eve, and that you don't love me any more."

She let her eyelids droop. Her face grew red.

"I do. Of course I do," she said.

"No. You don't," he said. "I'm a dull fool. I don't blame you. I've realised for ages that you're fed up with me."

"Michael!" she said aghast.

"Never mind, darling." He took her into his arms again, and kissed her hot cheeks. "You can't help it. Neither can I help loving you."

"But it isn't true," she said weakly. "I do love you. Of course I do."

"Not as you loved me when we first married."

She let him hold and caress her. Her cheeks remained hot and red and her lids drooping. Her heart beat painfully fast. He went on talking to her—Michael who was usually so silent. She realised for the first time in their married life together that he was not quite so placid or equable as she had imagined, that his selfless devotion, his admiration for her, were not enough. He wanted her to love him. He was unhappy. She had made him so.

"How mean, how beastly I am," she thought. "Yet I simply can't make wild love to him, and convince him that I feel what I felt in the old days. I simply can't. It's all gone—that sort of feeling."

She felt his lips touch her mouth and moved her head restively aside; then, with swift self-reproach, kissed him of her own accord.

"Dear, darling old Mike. Don't be miserable. Things can't ever remain the same. I mean, nobody feels five years afterwards what they felt on their wedding-day."

"I'm not at all sure I don't love you more to-day than I did five years ago," he said, with a short laugh.

"It's frightfully sweet of you," she said, in a helpless way.

He looked round the shadowy room; then at the slim, silk-clad figure in his arms. He felt suddenly very tired and lonely. He kissed her again on the hair.

"Good-night, darling," he said. "I'd better go."

"But don't be unhappy, Mike. I do love you. You've never been like this before. I thought we were so happy——" she floundered and stopped.

"If you're happy, I'm glad," he said. "And I am, of course. I've no right to ask too much of you."

She suddenly took his arm between her hands and laid her cheek against it.

"You've been absolutely angelic to me, always, Michael. I've been a horrid selfish little beast. I'm so sorry. But, Michael, you know that if I could have, I'd have given you a child."

The blood rushed to his long fair face. He pulled his arm away from her, got up, searched blindly in the pocket of his dressing-gown for a cigarette.

"Yes, that's been damnable. I wanted a kid damnably."

"You know how sorry I am," she repeated.

"It isn't your fault, sweetheart," he said, his back turned to her. "It may be mine. God knows."

"But you've got your work," she said. "You've made a success of that."

"Yes," he said. Then looked at her with a sudden, gallant smile. "Don't let's talk about it. We're getting quite morbid. All my fault. I honestly don't know what I've got to grumble at. You've been a marvellous little wife to me. I don't really think you've got a very passionate nature, Eve. If you're cold to me, I do know, anyhow, that you don't love anybody else. That's not like you, and I ought to be profoundly grateful. You're terribly appealing to men, and I'd have something to write home about if you fell in love with some other fellow, wouldn't I, sweetheart?"

He laughed, and with a last "good-night" went out.

Eve sat on the bed where he had left her. She was motionless. Something approaching fear lay in her eyes. For a long time after Michael had gone, she sat there, brooding, thinking. Then she suddenly turned and lay face downwards, her face buried on the curve of her arm. Her thoughts were chaotic—rushed, tumbled disastrously through her mind.

"'Not a passionate nature,'" she quoted her husband's last words. "I . . . *not passionate* . . . oh, God!"

Poor, blind Michael. Poor, poor Michael. He didn't know. He didn't understand. Thank heaven he didn't. He thought her cold, and was positive that she was not in love with anybody else. It was pitiful. Her own feelings terrified her. She wanted to run away from them and could not. She knew, as she lay there panting, eyes shut, that she was in love—madly and desperately in love—with Nicholas Rayne.

Three months ago, when Michael had first brought Rayne to see her, she had felt that something new and wonderful had come into her life. The vital charm of the man gripped her imagination, held it. His handsome head, his slight, graceful figure, appealed to all that was physical in her. And there had been plenty of mental appeal, too—his music; his love of books and of all art; his wit. She had found amazing stores of humour in him when she had come to know him better.

From the first it seemed to her that she had never ceased to be conscious of him. He came regularly to Bedford Gardens. Their friendship deepened and ripened and thrived. Sometimes he came with Mary Caley; more often than not he came alone. Frequently he returned from the hospital with Michael, and all three of them—a strange, ill-assorted trio—had dinner together and spent a musical evening. Or they dined out at some restaurant and went to a theatre or a cinema. At times, Michael was too busy to come with them; sent them off alone.

Michael had encouraged her friendship with Nicholas.

"Rayne's a very good fellow, and most entertaining. He's good for you, darling. He'll keep you amused," he had said more than once.

Eve had very quickly reached the conclusion that, although Nicholas amused her, he was not at all good for her. He was too electric and disturbing. She found it impossible to keep her own thoughts on a platonic plane, and she was fairly sure that he found her too attractive for his own peace of mind.

One evening, in April, he spent an evening alone with her in her warm amber drawing-room. They pushed the furniture and rugs aside and danced to the Savoy Band on the wireless. That night, for the first time, they flirted—just a little outrageously. He taught her to tango. It had ended with a kiss. Just an instant—her body bent backwards, his pale ardent face bending over hers . . . their lips had met. But only an instant. Then Nicholas had let her go, and laughed. They were flippant for the rest of the evening until Michael came back. But all the flippancy could not wipe out the memory of that one brief moment when they had been serious—a living, breathing, warm moment when they had clung together at the finale of that sensual dance.

In this hour, looking back on the last twelve weeks, Eve realised that it was on that night that she had first fallen in love with Nick—or at any rate become definitely conscious of her love for him. What he felt for her she did not know. But for a whole week after that kiss he did not come to Bedford Gardens. She suffered hatefully. She was racked with despair; afraid that she had been too abandoned, and

that he was suffering from reaction and hated her. She was also ashamed of herself. She was a married woman, and she had vowed at the altar to be faithful for all time to Michael. Michael trusted her, trusted her so implicitly that he saw no harm in her growing intimacy with Rayne, and even encouraged it. She felt a little beast. But the most poignant feeling of all was that of fear that Nicholas had gone for good.

Then Nicholas turned up again, quite suddenly, unasked, to a Sunday night meal. When she saw him again she felt almost sick with relief. But she tried not to show it. And he behaved as though that dance and that kiss had never been. He was nonchalant, amusing, friendly as ever. Everything was all right again. When they were alone, some days after that, he made no allusion to their dance or to the week in which he had absented himself. Eve came to the conclusion that she had been an hysterical little fool, and that he had not taken it nearly so seriously as she.

Later—much later—she learned that Nick stayed away that week because their one brief kiss had warned him of the real danger ahead. He had only come back because he had had time to cool down, to decide that he was not in love with her, but that he missed her companionship.

So the days and weeks had slipped by, Nicholas swinging from one mood to another, coming regularly . . . staying away . . . coming back again. And now, when he looked at her, Eve felt that his brilliant handsome eyes held some deep secret which was not for her . . . yet concerned her. She thought of him with alternate delight and despair. Not with the childish infatuation of her old passion for Hammond or the exalted love she had felt for the man she had married. But with a deeper-rooted, more dangerous passion. The love of a married woman for a man whom she wants for her lover.

It was a terrible kind of love. It hurt and gnawed and worried. At times she hated herself and hated Nicholas. But she went on wanting him.

2

Michael's sudden and unusual display of depression, because she was no longer in love with him, worried Eve

considerably. The very fact that she was in love with Nicholas pricked at her conscience. Of course she knew that she ought to keep away from Nick, never see him again. But it would have needed a stronger character than Eve to do the right thing. Nick's visits to the house, still innocent visits, meant a frightful lot to her. She could not send him away. She decided, however, not to see Nick alone any more. But almost half an hour after she reached that decision, Michael himself unconsciously precipitated his wife into the very danger she would have fled.

On the morning following their rather distressing little scene, he told her that he was going down to Torquay.

"I shall stay there the night, darling. Too far to come back. It's a serious case."

Eve, who was sitting at her dressing-table, manicuring her nails, looked at her husband's reflection in the mirror.

"A child, of course?"

"Yes. Little boy . . . parents rolling in wealth, and this kid, their only one, appears to be at death's door."

"So they've sent for the great Dr. Graham." She smiled at him, a little glow of pride in her eyes. Michael saw that look, and it brought him a sudden sense of comfort. He bent and kissed her neck.

"Sweetheart! Nothing very great about me. By the way, I don't want you to be lonely to-night."

"Oh, I shan't be," she said. "I'll do something cheerful."

"As a matter of fact, I rang up Rayne this morning and told him to come along and take you out," said Michael.

Eve sat very still. She ceased to polish her nails . . . sat staring at the brilliance of them. Her whole body grew hot . . . tingled. *Nick!* Michael had told Nick to come to-night, when she would be quite alone, when Michael would be in Torquay. She felt suddenly terrified.

"Oh, why did you do that?" she cried.

Michael stared at her in surprise.

"But, darling, he always amuses you. I thought you and Rayne were such good friends."

"Oh, we are," she said.

"Then why? . . ."

"I had other plans," she broke in. "But it's all right, Nick can come if he wants."

Michael strolled out of the room, whistling. And as she sat there, brooding over her nails, she felt almost as though a kind of fate were pursuing her. She had meant to do the right decent thing by Michael, not to see Nick too much in the future, not to see him alone if possible. And Michael was going down to Torquay and had asked Rayne to take her out.

A queer, warm excitement superseded the dismay in Eve's mind.

"Oh, well, what does it matter?" she thought. "It's done now. I shan't put him off. Probably he'll be very bored and cold, and the evening will be a complete frost."

Michael left for Torquay after lunch. Eve played bridge at her club most of the afternoon. She lost five pounds through sheer bad play. She was thinking of Nicholas and to-night. And she thought all kinds of mad, bad things . . . alternately dwelt on them and loathed herself.

She dressed for dinner in a state of nerves which she found hard to control. Michael had said that he had arranged for Rayne to take her out at half-past seven. He had taken seats for them at a theatre. Dear, kind Michael. And Eve, mentally at fever-heat, half-wished she was in Torquay with him, out of the way of temptation.

She felt that she looked her worst. Her hair would not lie down decently in spite of vigorous combing. Her dress was a failure; no amount of powder could make anything presentable of her face. That was because she wanted frightfully to look her most beautiful . . . for Nick.

When Parkes told her that Mr. Rayne was in the drawing-room waiting for her, she was trembling and quite white. She gave a last look at her mirror, switched off the light, and walked downstairs.

Nicholas Rayne's first impression when she entered the room was that he had never seen her look lovelier. A slim, silver Eve to-night—silver tissue and palest green; short full skirt with little green jewelled flowers sewn on the hem and green jewelled straps on her white shoulders. Eve, in a silver cloak, huge mink collar framing her face. He thought that her eyes looked like green jewels, too. He had never seen them sparkle so.

Speechlessly he stared, and thought :

"Oh, damn . . . why does she look so adorable? Why did Graham go away and put me in charge of her? It's too much. . . ."

And then, casually:

"Hello, ten minutes late. That's what you women are."

Eve, equally casual in tone:

"Ten minutes! That's nothing. Some women keep men waiting a good hour."

"I shouldn't wait," said Nicholas.

They laughed. He put a hand up to his tie.

"Straight?" he asked.

"Perfectly," said Eve. "A model."

"God forbid. Well. Where shall we go? We've got to have a quick meal. Show's at 8.30. What is it?"

"A Norman Roxley play. 'Sin is Too Dull.'"

"That's a good title. And quite right."

"What—you think sin is too dull, do you, Nick?"

"I never sin," he said piously. "But I'm sure it would be dull."

She laughed, her eyes suddenly mischievous.

"Try, and see."

"Who shall I sin with?"

"Mary Caley."

"I really can't sin with Mary. I know her too well."

"Well, I'll find you someone," she coquetted.

He said recklessly:

"A pity you're a respectable married woman, Eve. It might be nice to sin with you."

She grew red as a rose.

"Or dull."

"This is a most improper conversation," said Nick.

"Come and have some dinner, you terrible young woman."

"All right, you terrible young man."

They were in high spirits, laughing, joking as they went out to the car which Nick had come in. As they drove down Campden Hill toward High Street, Kensington, Eve said:

"I used to know Norman Roxley. At least, I saw him once at a studio-rag and I knew a girl who . . . was great friends with him."

"He hasn't a very savoury reputation."

"No. He's a swine. But his plays are amusing."

"And if we find 'Sin is Too Dull' too dull, we can go on and dance," said Nick.

"Where?"

"Any night-club you like."

"Where one can't dance," she jeered.

"No. Your drawing-room floor is better."

"Then we'll go home and dance the tarantelle."

"Certainly not. After the show I shall leave you at your doorstep with a formal and frigid bow," said Nick.

"Michael has put you in my charge to-night; remember that," he added.

She did not answer. But she bit her lower lip, and stared out of the window. They were approaching Piccadilly. She could see the electric signs flashing, rolling, circling. London in gay mood . . . a warm, pleasant London on this May night. She thought:

"If I hadn't been married, if I were just—alone in the world, and Nick was taking me out . . . how marvellous it would be."

Why, why had Nick come into her life when she was firmly married and there were a hundred barriers between them?

3

They dined at the Café Royal—a quick, excellent meal. They sat through Norman Roxley's new play and found it amusing, more because they were in the mood to be amused than anything. In the intervals, they strolled into the foyer and smoked, and Nicholas Rayne felt absurdly proud of his companion. A good many men—women, too—turned to look twice at Eve's slim silver figure and glowing face.

Then, when the last curtain rang down on "Sin is Too Dull," they stood outside the theatre in the mild summer night and wondered what to do next. Eve looked up at the glittering stars and hoped madly that Nick would not send her home and leave her—just yet. Nick looked at Eve, and told himself that he ought to send her home.

"It's too warm to dance on a few inches of floor at the Pompadour, or anywhere else, don't you think?" he asked.

"We'll go home and dance, if you like," she said.

Her heart beat very quickly, but she spoke in a non-chalant sort of voice.

"I don't think we'd better," he said.

"Why not?" she challenged him.

He turned suddenly, and gave her a straight look from his dark bright eyes—a look that made her heart turn over.

"Why ask me to explain? I think you know," he said.

It was the first time he had ever intimated that he was attracted by her. The knowledge almost intoxicated her. She was terribly in love with him. There was a terrible kind of ecstasy in this revelation of feeling. Somehow it drove all reason from her over-excited mind. She became Eve in earnest, provocative, challenging. She smiled up at him.

"Nick—you old silly. Of course you can come back for a bit."

"No," he said.

"Nick, you're keeping me out here in the chill night air. I shall catch pneumonia, and die. Call a taxi."

He drew a sharp breath and took his gaze from her. He was quite well aware that all the woman in her was challenging him, his manhood. He kept on trying to remember that Michael Graham, this girl's husband and his colleague, was down in Torquay. He must remember Michael. He must not make love to Eve Graham. But he wanted to make love to her to-night more than he had ever wanted anything. He had always tried to leave married women alone. But Eve—God!—Eve was maddening him.

They walked along the pavement together until an empty taxi came their way. Then he hailed it. In silence Eve got into the vehicle.

Nick gave the address in Bedford Gardens and took his place beside her.

Her eyes sparkled at him in the dusk.

"Nick, you're cross about something. I've never seen you cross before."

"I cross? Good Lord, no. Only worried."

"What about?"

"You . . . myself . . . both of us."

She breathed quickly.

"Don't worry. Life's too short."

"It is," he agreed with a laugh. "Too damnably short."

It's also too long sometimes . . . when one suddenly finds one wants something that belongs to somebody else."

She knew what he meant. She knew beyond doubt that he was in love with her. The game was being played in earnest now. There was still time to draw back. But she did not want to draw back. She, too, was suffering from repression. She wanted, more than anything on earth, Nick to make love to her. She sat beside him, cheeks grown suddenly pale, lips half-apart. Her hands, clutching her jewelled bag, were trembling.

"Eve," said Nick. "Don't think me beastly, dear. But I'm going to say good-night to you when we get to your place, and push off to my digs."

She caught her breath.

"Don't be silly, Nick."

"I'm trying to be sensible."

"Why—what's this all about—anyhow?"

"You know," he said. His voice was suddenly savage. "Don't drag it out of me. You're Michael's wife. I simply must not forget that. If I stay with you any longer this evening I shall forget it. Eve, for the love of God, help me. You're not helping a bit."

An immense depression suddenly replaced her elation, her feverish happiness at being with him. She gave a little groan and covered her face with her hands.

"Nick, Nick, I can't help you. I want helping myself . . . I . . . Oh, don't leave me!"

He looked at her. The little piteous cry: "*I can't help you. I want helping myself. . . . Oh, don't leave me,*" drove all thoughts of Michael, honour, decency, from his mind.

"Eve," he said in a husky voice. "Eve—please——"

She uncovered her face. He saw it, tear-stained, anguished, all the radiance driven from it. She flung her head and her hands back in a strange little attitude of surrender.

"I—can't bear it, Nick. You've brought the most marvellous happiness into my life. I've been unhappy. Yes, you've known it. Michael is so good to me, so kind. But we are miles and miles apart. You know that, and we've had no children. Sometimes I'm lonely . . . so

lonely . . . I could go mad. I'm not pretending—I'm not, just trying . . . to find amusement. . . ." She broke off with a wild little laugh.

"I know you aren't," he said. "Eve, I've seen your unhappiness and your loneliness. But I've tried not to see. Oh, damn . . ." he added miserably. "I mustn't come any more—I mustn't see you again."

She gave him a sharp, frightened look.

"Nick . . . Nick . . . never again?"

"Never," he said. "It's the only thing. I tell you frankly you attract me more than any woman has ever attracted me. But I've got to do the right thing, and so have you."

She gave a shuddering sob.

"Nick . . . I can't bear it. I'm not strong. I'm weak. Oh, Nick. . . ."

He saw tears pouring down her cheeks. It drove the last remnant of his self-control from him. Perhaps the very fact that Eve Graham was not his, not for him, made him want her more than he had ever wanted any woman in his life. And they had so many things in common . . . mentally . . . physically.

He hesitated, and was lost. Her silver cloak with the big fur collar slipped back. She was in his arms, and his cheek was pressed against her wet one. His right hand caressed her madly; touched the smooth beauty of her bare shoulders, her arms, her back, her breast. She was his—not passively—but warmly, responsively, her arms about his neck, small hands on his hair. He groaned.

"Eve, Eve. This is wrong. But you madden me. I love you. I want you. Oh, my dear. . . ."

She looked up at him, her eyes a little bemused with passion. Her heart beat frantically fast. She pulled the smooth dark head down to hers.

"Nick," she whispered. "Oh, Nick. . . ."

"Don't let me kiss you," he said. The warm, tempting flower of her mouth was seeking for his. And he was afraid. He knew his own volcanic temperament—the folly of all this.

"Don't let me kiss you, darling," he repeated. "Take your arms away. Eve . . . please . . . help me to be good."

"I don't want you to be good. I love you. I shall go

mad if you don't love me," she said, in an incoherent voice.

"Eve—you're married to Michael."

"But I love you!"

The words tumbled out hotly. As she said them she knew she was burning her boats. No feeling that she had ever endured for Lawrence, for Michael, for anybody, had been as tempestuous, as urgent, as this. She was beyond caring about right or wrong; past thinking. Her hands pulled his head nearer. Her wild emotion communicated itself to the man. She was love, desire, incarnate. And he was hungering for her.

His lips touched hers, lightly at first. Then he was lost. His mouth and hers were one. They clung in a kiss that was almost terrible in its intensity.

There was no time, no space for self-analysis, for dissection, in Eve's mind now. While that kiss endured she was no longer herself. She was just his. Woman and mate for his manhood. All that was primitive and fierce in her was uppermost, and he met it, splendidly, passion for her passion, desire for her desire. If she thought at all it was only to tell herself that this was the perfect love. It was forbidden, but, beyond all things, it was wonderful. She wished almost that she could die before he could take his mouth from her mouth and their wild embrace ended.

The car stopping outside the house in Bedford Gardens brought Nicholas to his senses.

"Forgive me," he said. "Forgive me, dear. I . . . we mustn't see each other again. Good night . . . good-bye . . . darling Eve."

"We can't say good-bye like this. You must come in."

"No. God! I wouldn't dare."

"But you can't say good-bye to me—now."

"I must. Can't you understand? Don't you see that I love you, that I'm in love with you?"

Her heart leaped to the words.

"And I love you. Now we know—we've found each other—how can we separate?"

"Because you're another man's wife. I feel a cad for even kissing you, like that."

"Then I'm a cad, too."

"We are both mad," he said. "But it's my fault, and not yours."

Her eyes filled with tears.

"That's decent of you, Nick. Generous. But it's been my fault. I can't—I won't ever blame you."

"Darling," he said. "You're sweet. Too damnably sweet. I simply couldn't go on seeing you after this."

"Nick, can't we try and be sensible? *I must see you again.*"

"I couldn't be sensible. Neither of us could. We are made for each other. Don't you realise that?"

"Yes, I do. I do."

"If I kissed you again," he said, looking straight into her eyes. "If *you* kissed *me* as you did just now, I wouldn't answer for myself. Michael put you in my charge . . . oh, hell . . ." He broke off savagely, seized her hands and put his face against them. He covered her fingers with kisses. "Go, dear, do . . . please. Go, and help me."

The taxi-driver opened the door. She was forced to get out. But she was racked with intolerable anguish when she stood on the pavement and saw him sitting in the taxi, alone. His white face looked desperate. He was trying to find a cigarette in his coat-pocket.

She held her fur collar close to her throat, and put her head in the taxi.

"Nick . . . you must see me to-morrow . . . ring me up."

"I daren't, darling," he said. "Honestly. You've been adorable. Let me go now, for God's sake. Good-bye."

She let herself into the house, and walked straight up to her bedroom. She was like one dazed.

She sat down on her bed heavily, and stared at the floor.

Her mind reiterated, "Nick . . . Nick . . . Nick . . ."

Her whole body was still tingling—clamoured for him. Wonderful Nick . . . wonderful lover. It was just as she had dreamed of it—that long, terrible kiss—he was as she had dreamed he would be. Her lover.

But not for her. He had gone, and he had said they must not meet again. A feeling of awful disaster rushed across Eve—reaction. She knew that she had been disloyal to Michael. But the most frightful thing of all was the knowledge that she *wanted to go on betraying him*. Wanted Nick for her lover. Wanted to belong to Nick—utterly,

She flung herself face downward on the big divan bed, pressing her hands against her burning eyelids. She said :

" Nick . . . Nick . . . Nick . . . " again and again.

A crazy sort of feeling possessed her . . . almost the feeling that she must get up and go to him . . . tell him she could not endure this pain.

But of course she could not go. It was all so futile—the agony, the aching longing, the despair. She was Michael's wife. Nick was his colleague, his friend. It was an impossible position.

4

Eve was up very early that next morning ; up long before the usual hour. As a rule, she stayed in bed to breakfast. This morning she found it impossible to remain in bed and just think. She felt she would go mad. She was physically and mentally ill. She was appalled when she looked in her mirror. How white she was ; how plain she had become in one short night. Pink nose, reddened eyelids through much crying, pale, blotchy face.

" If Nick saw me now I don't think he'd love me," she thought, with a wretched smile at her reflection.

And then she tried, desperately, not to think of Nick. It hurt too much. But she could not stop thinking of him. All through that dreadful morning she remained in the house, walking restlessly from one room to another, not knowing what to do with herself. She hoped against hope that Nick might find his own longing for her insupportable, and either ring up or call to see her before he went to the hospital. She dared not go out, although she had shopping to do, in case she should miss him. But he neither telephoned nor came. The hours dragged by. Every time the telephone-bell rang, she fled to it before Parkes reached it, heart pounding, cheeks on fire—only to be disappointed.

At two o'clock she received a wire from Michael :

Home to tea.

She felt frozen by the thought of his return. How could she face him . . . act a part . . . pretend to be normal . . . when she was sick with love . . . when she wanted

Nick so terribly? Would Michael notice? Could she throw dust in his eyes? Say she was ill? Or be specially nice to him in order to blind him to her condition of mind? She shuddered at the idea of her husband's embrace. Now that she loved Nick . . . it was revolting—intolerable—to be the wife of another man.

At three o'clock she was still in the house, her nerves in shreds, body and brain almost numb with suffering. Then, at quarter-past three, Parkes brought her a huge bunch of roses—pale-pink, fragrant things with dew on them, and cool dark green leaves. She picked up the card attached. From *him*. Some comfort, some balm to her sore, aching heart.

She looked at the little card.

"Mr. Nicholas Rayne, M.D., F.R.C.S." crossed out. Under it, in his funny, small, professional hand:

Bless you. I shall never forget. N.

She took the roses up to her bedroom, and put them in a vase by her bedside. She felt that her heart would break in two with need of him. And he loved her. He would never forget last night.

"It can't be the end," she thought. "It mustn't be. It would be too awful."

After the long hours of misery this morning, she was weak and unbalanced. She felt that she could not face her husband until she had seen Nick again. It would be wrong, perhaps even disastrous, to see him to-day, force his hand in any way. But she was like one crazy with passion. After receiving those flowers, token of his love for her, she dressed carefully, and sent Parkes out for a taxi.

"I must see him," she told herself. "*I must*. I shall go mad if I don't!"

She knew he would be at the consulting-room in Queen Anne Street between three and four this afternoon—it was his afternoon there. Thursday.

She put on a thin black georgette dress which made her look very slender, a satin coat with collar and cuffs of monkey fur, her tight collar of pearls, a black crinoline hat with a droopy brim. She looked pale, shadowy-eyed, pathetic, in that hat. She touched her lips with vermilion, put scent behind her ears and on her hands, and pinned

two of Nick's roses on her shoulder. She was conscious that she looked beautiful, intriguing, with that unusual pallor and the sorrowful lilac stains under her eyes.

Her heart beat violently when the taxi drew up before the house in Queen Anne Street, where Michael and Nicholas shared the consulting-room. She had been here so many times to see Michael. It was all familiar. Yet to-day it seemed strange. Strange when Harrison the butler opened the door to her, and she asked for Mr. Rayne. The butler knew her, of course.

"Good afternoon, madam. Mr. Rayne is engaged at the moment."

"I'll wait," said Eve.

"I don't think he'll be very long," said Harrison.

But it seemed to Eve that she sat a very long time in the familiar waiting-room before the man returned to tell her that Mr. Rayne was free.

She was strung up to a high pitch of emotion when at last she walked into the consulting-room. The butler closed the door behind her. Eve saw Nick, looking very professional in striped trousers and morning coat. Nick, with a white stern face and eyes that looked almost as though he felt a doom hanging over his head.

"Why have you come?" were his first words.

She swallowed hard, moved toward him.

"Oh, Nick—I had to!" she said.

He gripped the desk behind him.

"You shouldn't have come. It isn't fair—to either of us."

She reached him, placed her bag on the desk, held out both small *suede*-gloved hands.

"Nick, don't be cross with me now I have come. I've been through hell all this morning," she said. "I'm at breaking-point."

Just for an instant Nicholas Rayne hesitated.

Then he gripped the outstretched hands.

"I've been through hell, too," he said. "But isn't it storing up a worse kind of hell for us to go through another good-bye? . . ."

"I don't care," she said. "I only know I must see you. I think I'm going mad, Nick."

He looked at her—for an instant, not as man looks at the

woman he loves, but as a doctor sees a patient. She was ill—no doubt she was, as she said, at breaking-point.

He, too, had almost reached that pitch. In hospital this morning he had worked like a madman. Anything to make him stop thinking about Eve Graham. But he could not stop wanting her. He thought of her, unhappy, needing him, trying to make something out of her life with Michael . . . thought until his brain was on fire.

He had told himself that he would not be able to go on sharing this consulting-room and seeing Graham every day. Eve was too much in the background . . . she would always be there. He wouldn't have a chance to forget her.

Now she was here, alone with him, and they would not be disturbed. His last patient with whom he had an appointment had just gone.

"Tell me you are glad I've come," she said, and gave him a tired smile—such an indescribably dreary little smile. It seemed to break his heart. He put his arms about her, and stood with his face buried against the warm whiteness of her neck. He said:

"Yes, but oh, my dear, my sweet, you shouldn't have come."

She relaxed in his embrace. It was such an exquisite, yet terrible, relief to feel his arms about her. She shut her eyes tightly, put one arm about his waist and one round his neck. She drew him to her closely.

"Darling, darling Nick," she whispered.

"Beloved," he said. "Do you really love me so much?"

"Too much . . . unbearably," she said. The fatigue, the dreariness had dropped from her. She was alive, vital now with passionate love and happiness. She felt him shivering. She said, with her lips against his ear: "Tell me you love me . . . tell me . . . tell me, Nick."

"I love you terribly . . . madly," he said. "You're so lovely and dear . . . so much what I've always wanted. We think alike . . . you and I. We are alike."

"Alike," she repeated dreamily. She passed her lips over his smooth black head. "Yes . . . I know. That's what's so wonderful. I feel we're one . . . in every way."

"Beloved," he said again.

He raised his head and looked down at her now;

marvelled at her transfigured face. He took her hat off tenderly, laid it on the desk. He peeled off her gloves, kissing her palms, her fingers, as he did so. She did not speak . . . only stood, acquiescent, rapt, while he touched and caressed her.

Then she was in his arms again and he kissed her hair, her ears, her cheeks and closed eyes.

"Nick, Nick, you're driving me mad," she panted.

"You've driven me mad," he said. "I *am* mad. I adore you. You little, lovely thing . . ."

She felt his pale sensitive hand against her breast, and remembered how she had watched him touch her Venetian doll and longed to feel his hands on her. Feverishly she seized that wandering hand and pressed her lips against his wrist.

"Nick, Nick. I've never loved any man like this."

"Never. You are sure?"

"My God, yes. Sure."

"But you shouldn't love me and I shouldn't love you."

"But we can't stop loving each other, Nick."

"We can, and must."

"Nick, don't lecture me. I'm too unhappy."

"I'm devilishly unhappy myself, darling. I want you like hell. You lovely, vital thing . . ." He let his hands slip down her waist to her hips, drew her yet nearer him.

"Eve, there's electricity in you. You drive one crazy."

"What about you? Aren't you electric enough?" She laughed a little wildly, locking her arms round his neck. "When I first saw you I felt dumb. . . . You were the most vital thing I'd ever met."

"We're made for each other, beloved . . . two volcanic, crazy creatures."

"Dearest, we must try to be a little sane," he said. His eyes were black, sombre in his white face. He held her back in his embrace a little, stared down at her, then laughed. "God, who wouldn't want to love you and forget to be sane? You're adorable."

"Why do you love me?" she asked. "I'm a silly fool and not in the least adorable. I'm selfish, mad, and bad."

"Don't say that. You're not bad. I've known bad women. They aren't like you, Eve," he said. "You're only a child. Yet you're all woman—essentially a woman. You are made for love and loving."

She looked up at him with something approaching worship in her eyes.

"You understand me, Nick. Nobody else ever has."

"Yes, I think I do," he said. "Aren't we alike? Up in the heights one moment . . . down in the depths the next. The curse of having a temperament, darling. I ought never to have been a doctor."

She suddenly put her lips against his shoulder and sniffed.

"Ether . . . you smell of it so strongly. No! Don't say you're sorry. I like it."

"I think it's beastly. I can't smell it myself. But I suppose you can," he smiled—faun-like again—the gloom chased from his face. "I was operating all the morning."

"You—cutting people up with those wonderful hands of yours?"

"You foolish little thing."

"They are wonderful hands to me."

He hugged her close, groaning her name.

"Eve, Eve, Eve. Oh, you adorable person. You're so absolutely natural and unashamed. That's what I like in you."

"You don't think me brazen—abandoned? Some men might think that."

"Not I."

"That's because you understand," she said, in a hushed voice. "Nick, I think I'm terribly lucky to have your love. Heaps of women must love you and want you."

"Oh, heaps—queues waiting outside my door," he laughed, his eyes gay, brilliant, again, his mood soaring upward.

"Don't laugh at me."

"I must. You're so sweet and funny. And love means laughter, my dear adorable."

She drew a deep breath, hands behind his smooth head. She said:

"Yes, love means laughter. You're right, my dear. And I want to laugh with you. That's the most priceless part of our love. The fun and the music and the friendliness of it."

"And the passion," he added. "Don't!" he said sharply. "I've too vivid an imagination. You . . . all my own . . . God . . ."

His hands were warm and passionate about her again and they were clinging together, madly, hopelessly. She was crying now—tears more bitter than she had ever shed.

"Nick, I can't go back . . . to *him*."

"You must, darling. You know you must. He's such a good fellow. I know he isn't just right for you, but you can't let him down. I can't."

"But I can't live without you," she stammered, her hands frenzied about him. "Nick, Nick, you can't desert me now."

"God forbid I should ever desert you, darling. But we must consider Michael. Don't cry. Eve, it's more than I can bear to see you cry."

"I can't act a part. . . . I can't . . . he'll see that I love you."

"Sweetheart, you mustn't let him see. We'd never forgive ourselves for hurting him."

"I know," she said. She sobbed desolately. "You're so decent about Mike. So much more decent than I am. I think men are more honourable than women."

"No, men are beasts. But although it's like death to me to lose you, darling heart, we can't hurt him between us. He loves you. It would smash him up."

"I don't want to hurt him. But I do need you."

"We simply mustn't see each other again, Eve."

"You said that last night, Nick, and it drove us both nearly crazy."

He let her go. He was shaking violently. He began to pace up and down the consulting-room in the restless fashion so familiar to her, both hands pressed to his head.

"Eve, I'm a mad sort of fellow. How d'you think this will all end if you go on tempting me?"

"I don't know," she said. "Oh, God, I don't know, Nick." She sat down heavily in his swivel chair. She felt hot, feverish, worn out with emotion.

"But I do know," he said. "Please, darling, go home. I'm damn well at breaking-point myself, now."

The clock was striking four. Eve heard it. It was like the knell of doom to her. Michael's wire had said he would be home at four. She felt sick at the thought of facing his kind trusting eyes and his questioning. She looked

despairingly at Nick. He paced up and down, up and down. At last she said in a small, flat voice :

"All right, Nick. I'd better go."

Before he answered, somebody knocked on the door. Nick stood still.

"Who is it?" he said.

"Harrison, sir."

"Come in, Harrison."

The butler entered.

"Shall you be seeing any more patients this afternoon, sir?"

"No. Nobody else."

"Would you care for tea, sir?"

"No. I'm going to the hospital in a few minutes. And, Harrison, I shan't want you any more."

"Very good, sir."

Nick lit a cigarette. He did not, dared not, look at the small huddled figure in his chair. She said :

"Does Harrison go home now?"

"Yes."

"And you're due at the hospital?"

"Not for an hour. But I shall go and walk. Last night I walked the streets for two hours after I left you."

"Did you?" she whispered forlornly. "And I cried . . . cried and cried . . . I couldn't sleep."

"God, it's rotten," he said. "Life's rotten. Why should these hellish things happen to us? Why does one make such mistakes? If you hadn't married Michael you might have been my wife."

"Would you have liked that, Nick?"

"Adored it. But I'm not a quarter as decent a fellow as Michael."

"I love you. That's all I know," she said. Then irrelevantly. "May I 'phone?"

"Of course."

She telephoned through to her house. Parkes answered.

"Is the doctor home, Parkes?" she asked.

"No, madam. But a telegram has just come for you."

"Read it to me, Parkes."

A short silence. Then Parkes' polite voice :

"It's from the doctor, madam. It says: 'Unable to

reach home till late to-night. Delayed at my case. Don't wait dinner.' "

"Thank you, Parkes. Any other message? "

"Nothing, madam."

Eve hung up the receiver. She looked at Nick, her pulses jerking.

"Michael has wired he won't be home till late to-night."

"H'm," said Nick.

"Don't send me home. Let me stay with you . . . a little longer, Nick." She spoke in a suffocated voice.

He came up to her swiftly; knelt down before her, and circled her with his arms. His eyes were glittering.

"You're mad," he said. "Mad to ask me to keep you here. I'm not safe, Eve. I know myself. Don't you realise that we're absolutely alone in this room? Harrison has gone. Nobody else will come. I . . . oh, for God's sake, go away . . . please. . . ."

His head was on her knees. She could feel the warmth of his face penetrate her thin georgette frock.

A kind of madness—his madness—communicated itself to her. Nothing mattered . . . nothing except this moment, this intensity of feeling which gripped and held them.

"I don't care," she said. "I don't care. Keep me a little while. I love you."

He looked up at her wildly.

"You don't belong to me. You're *his*. Eve, Eve, you know how I want you . . . it isn't fair . . . you can't stay. . . ."

She stood up and he rose with her. She pressed close to him.

"I won't go. We may only have this one hour. One hour in all our lives. Nick, darling, darling . . . can't I know one hour of real love . . . can't I be blindly, madly happy for once? "

"Is it worth it? " he asked hoarsely. "It's a sin, Eve. You'd regret it . . . terribly."

"I shan't regret anything . . . I shall only regret it if I go away now and miss what may be the one chance I shall ever have of perfect happiness—with you."

"You're mad, darling. We mustn't . . ."

"I could never regret anything, even sin, with you—"

for you," she added. Her face seemed to him pale, beautiful, ecstatic, her cheek pressed against his shoulder. And he wanted her more terribly than he had ever wanted any woman.

He gave a long sigh as though resigning himself to Fate. Like one intoxicated he stumbled to the window and drew the velvet curtains across, shutting out the sombre grey of the hot yet sunless afternoon.

The consulting-room was plunged in shadow. In the dim light he saw Eve, arms stretched above her head, ecstatic young face tilted back, eyes shut. He thought she was like some pagan priestess, offering herself to the gods. He walked back to her and took her in his arms.

CHAPTER III

I

VERY early that next morning a thunderstorm broke over London—a sharp storm which cleared the air, and ended about five o'clock with a heavy downpour of rain.

Eve Graham slept right through that storm. She—who was usually frightened of thunder and lightning, and woke at the first peal of thunder.

Michael had come back from Torquay even later than he had anticipated, so late that he had found his wife in bed and asleep, and had not disturbed her. But when the storm broke he had fully expected her to come into his room, which she usually did, and creep into his bed to be “protected.” She was like a frightened child at such times.

To his surprise she did not come, did not wake. He took it for granted that she must have been out, dancing, and was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.

At eight o'clock he put on his dressing-gown and walked into her room. It was his habit to have his early cup of tea with her. The housemaid had set the tray beside Eve, but left the curtains drawn. She hated the bright morning light in her eyes. It was still dim and shadowy in her room.

“Wake up, lazy,” he said. “Your tea’s here.”

Eve woke with a start. She saw Michael’s tall figure, sitting on the edge of her bed. Immediately she sat up. Her cheeks blushed bright red and her eyes, heavy with sleep, looked curiously frightened. She said incoherently:

“Oh, Mike . . . you . . . back . . . oh, hello . . . what’s the time?”

“You *are* a sleepy child,” he said. “It’s five past eight. Didn’t you hear the thunder? I felt sure it would wake you.”

She rubbed her eyes. The colour died from her face and left it curiously pallid. Her lips were still a bright vermilion from last night’s use of lip-stick. There were dark half-moons under her eyes. Wide awake now, she said:

"No. I didn't hear it. Was there a storm?"

"Yes, quite a sharp one. What were you doing last night to make you sleep so soundly, eh, darling?"

He spoke in a jocular tone and bent to kiss her cheek. He was astounded to see her flush bright crimson again and draw back from him.

"What's wrong, sweetheart? You haven't been ill while I've been away, have you? Darling——"

She interrupted, very white again now.

"Nothing the matter with me. Of course not. Only sleepy. And you know I hate being kissed at this time of day."

"Or at any time, so far as that goes, you cold little frog. Pour out my tea for me."

She dived under her pillow for a powder puff and passed it across her face, found a small comb and ran it through her hair, then reached down to the bottom of the bed for her dressing-jacket—a delicate thing of grey georgette with tiny frills of coral velvet. Then she raised herself on one elbow and began to pour out Michael's tea.

"What time did you get back?" she asked calmly.

"Quarter to twelve."

"Funny hour."

"I stayed with the child till late. But it died, poor little thing. . . ."

"How awful!" said Eve.

But she was not thinking of the child. Now that she was awake her brain was working . . . furiously . . . had leapt straight to the thought of Nick. Nick and yesterday afternoon.

"God," she thought. "If Michael ever suspected . . ."

"What did you do yesterday, dear?" he asked.

"Oh . . . nothing much. . . ."

"But the night after I went down to Torquay. What did you do with Rayne?"

She stirred her tea, face bent over the cup so that he could not see her expression.

"Dined at the Café Royal; went to Roxley's play; came home."

"Enjoy it, darling?"

"Very much."

Michael drank his tea.

"Ah! That's good"—set down the cup. Looked at his wife, a trifle curiously. "You're very subdued, darling. Sure you're feeling fit?"

"Certain."

"Look at me. You're very white, dear."

The blood rushed to her face again. She moved her head with a gesture of exasperation.

"Oh, do leave me alone, Michael. I'm all right."

"You needn't be so grumpy about it," he said, in an injured tone. "I only wanted to make sure you are fit."

"Of course I am. And you know I'm not talkative in the early morning."

She had put her own cup down. Dived under the bed-clothes. She was not really grumpy. She really felt a strange desire to seize her husband's hand and kiss it, burst into tears, tell him everything, beseech him to forgive her. But of course she couldn't do that. That was only being hysterical. Stupid. Conscience-stricken. His cross-questioning rather unnerved her. He got up and strolled to her window, looked out.

"Going to be a nice day. The storm has cleared the air. But it's too beastly close in town. I must try and get a holiday and we'll go away, shall we, darling? Out to France or Italy?"

"I don't want to. Oh, I don't know. Yes, it wouldn't be bad." Her voice was muffled. If only poor old Michael wouldn't hang about her room talking. If only he would go.

When at last he did leave her to turn on his bath, she gave a long sigh and sat up. Sat with her arms tightly about huddled knees, eyes enormous, staring blindly before her.

"Nick," she whispered. "Nick . . ."

Then let her eyes slowly close. Slowly, almost jealously, dwelt on yesterday . . . on every moment of their last ecstatic hour in the consulting-room. The wonder of it . . . the wonder and rapture . . . in Nick's arms. And that was love . . . love surely as it was meant to be between man and woman.

Just before she had left Nicholas, he had taken her in his arms and asked her if she regretted. She had said:

"Regret. I? . . . Never! I shall never regret. It has been too wonderful. . . . And I love you too much."

He had seemed to her strange and quiet for Nick—

almost preoccupied—as though the weight of his thoughts dragged him down. But he had remained utterly her lover. If not the vital, urgent lover who had created her ecstasy and shared it, he had been quietly tender. Almost with a melancholy tenderness he had said good-bye to her.

“Darling, forgive me——” he had said.

“But there’s nothing to forgive,” she had answered.

“Yes . . . a great deal,” he had said. “It was madness. One always pays for madness. But don’t imagine I’m regretting. Every minute, every hour, I shall think of you as you were this afternoon . . . adorable . . . mine!”

They had found it impossible to discuss their future movements. They were both of them afraid. . . . Afraid to suggest another meeting . . . afraid to make up their minds never to meet again. It was left in a state of indecision. He had said he would ring her up this morning. She had gone, taking with her only the memory of his warm passion for her, his tenderness.

She bowed her head on her knees ; closed her eyes. She felt cold and miserable. She wondered what Nick was feeling this morning. For an instant she shuddered at the possibility that he might have a revulsion of feeling ; then visualised him needing her as urgently as she needed him. But the difficulties ahead were ghastly. She felt altogether unnerved.

She could have abandoned Michael and gone to Nick so easily had Michael been a swine, a brute to her. But it would be very hard to leave him after his years of fidelity and devotion. It would also be equally hard to do without Nick, now. She pressed her knuckles against her eyelids and groaned a little.

“God, what are we going to do ? What can we do ? ”

She began to shiver with nerves. Her thoughts were chaotic. They would keep swinging back to yesterday . . . yesterday afternoon . . . that intimate, stolen hour with her lover.

And suddenly she thought :

“Supposing Michael found out. Supposing Mummy and Daddy ever found out . . .”

Awful thought. Daddy—nice, clean-minded, jolly old Daddy, who always thought the best of people and was so proud of her, these days, so devoted to his son-in-law. Mummy—even more difficult ; also proud of her daughter,

now that the marriage appeared to be such a success, but strictly proper and narrow-minded. *What* would Mummy say ? ”

Then there was Anne—Michael’s sister, who was so fond of her, believed in her. The thought of Anne seemed to hurt Eve more than anything. To see a look of scorn, of horror in Anne’s eyes ; to imagine Anne despising her for being an unfaithful wife. That was anguish. She adored Anne. And yet—even though Anne was Michael’s sister and loved him—she had a big, generous heart. She never despised those weaker than herself. Perhaps Anne would understand, even this ; understand how much she, Eve, had wanted Nick . . . how she had tried, honestly tried, to be a good wife to Michael.

Eve’s sore eyes smarted with tears. Quickly she brushed them away.

“ I must stop worrying or I shall certainly go off my head . . . and betray myself to Michael.”

After her bath she felt better. A little skilful use of rouge and powder made her look less haggard and drawn. She put on a jumper and pleated *crêpe-de-chine* skirt. Just as she was pinning a georgette flower on one shoulder, Michael, fully dressed, strolled into her room.

“ Up already, darling ? Not having breakfast in bed ? ”

“ No, not this morning.”

“ You’re very energetic. What are you doing to-day ? ”

“ Nothing much.”

He picked up a coat which hung over a chair. The room was very disordered. It always was, until Greaves, the housemaid, put Eve’s clothes away for her. He fingered the coat thoughtfully, his mind on something else. Then he frowned ; lifted the coat up and smelt it.

“ I say, this smells faintly of ether. How funny.”

Her heart jumped. She swung round, eyes widening. That coat—the black satin one with the monkey-fur on collar and cuffs. Of course, she had worn it yesterday when she was with Nick. She remembered how that he had come straight from an operation, that he had smelt strongly of ether. She had mentioned the fact. And it had impregnated her own clothes.

Michael went on sniffing the coat. His eyes looked at his wife.

"Hello, hello—what's all this about?" he said.
"You've been in very close touch with an anæsthetic. What have you been up to?"

He spoke in a jocular way, but Eve, whose nerves were jumpy, snapped back at him.

"Oh, don't be so silly."

"But it's a fact, darling. Your coat smells of it."

"Is that so strange for the wife of a doctor?"

"I don't smell of it. I'm not a surgeon. Ah ha! I know now. Nick, of course. You wore this when you went out with him."

He was still joking. But it made her feel as though she could scream aloud. She tried to laugh.

"You *are* stupid, Mike."

He dropped the coat. He walked up to her, and stood staring at her in a faintly puzzled fashion.

"Eve, you're not a bit like yourself this morning. I'm certain something has happened. Do tell me."

"Nothing at all," she said, dropping her gaze.

"Have you quarrelled with Nick, by any chance?" he suggested.

"Quarrelled with him?" She laughed shortly. "Oh, no."

"Something's happened to upset you," he persisted.

"Of course it hasn't."

He bit his lip, then dug both hands into his trouser pockets; sighed.

"Well, if you won't tell me, darling—all right."

"Nothing has happened!" she said wildly.

2

They walked down to breakfast together. Michael went on puzzling. He was not a very shrewd or subtle man, but he was not a fool, and only a fool could have imagined that Eve was in a normal condition this morning. He made several guesses, none of them right. He finally came to the conclusion that the trouble was connected in some way with Rayne. That they had had a slight disagreement yesterday, and Eve was too proud to admit it. Anyhow, he did not worry or question her further. After breakfast he went off to the hospital.

His

And then Eve, relieved beyond words to be left alone, waited for the telephone-bell to ring. Nick had promised to ring at eleven. It seemed hours before eleven o'clock came. She felt sick and wretched and nervy.

Then the bell rang. She answered the call in her bedroom. When she heard his voice, she felt hot, suddenly alive again.

"Oh, Nick," she said.

"How are you?"

"All right. And you?"

"Fairly all right. I slept rottenly."

"So did I, until late. Then I slept so soundly I didn't hear the storm."

"I watched the storm," came Nick's low vibrating voice. "It seemed to me . . . like us . . . all lightning . . . disturbing . . . wonderful."

She swallowed hard.

"Do you still love me?"

"Ssh . . . be careful . . . there are listeners."

"I don't care," she said recklessly.

"You must care."

"But you do love me?"

"Oh, God, of course."

"When are we going to meet?"

"We mustn't."

"We must." She was panting, lips close to the mouth-piece of the telephone. "I've been through a pretty bad time since I left you."

"Oh, my dear, didn't I say you'd be sorry?"

"It isn't that. I'm not sorry. I'm not. I——"

"Ssh," he said again. "We can't carry on this sort of conversation on the 'phone. It's frightfully dangerous."

"Then we'll have to meet," she said triumphantly.

"No, darling . . . really . . ."

"Yes," she insisted. For the moment she was stronger than he was. "We must."

"All right. But it must be for the last time. It's an impossible situation and we can't carry on. . . ."

"We'll talk about that later."

"Where shall we meet?"

"Come here."

"I can't possibly. He'll be there."

"No. He's lunching up at the hospital. It's his busy day. You know. Come after lunch for an hour."

"All right," he said weakly again.

Her cheeks burned. Her heart pounded.

"Oh, Nick . . ."

"I adore you," he said recklessly. "Good-bye."

That was all. But after it she was a changed woman—buoyant, deliriously happy in the anticipation of seeing him again. She went out, did a little shopping, had her hair washed and set, returned to lunch. Ate practically nothing, in a state of suppressed excitement. Changed jumper and skirt for a new frock which she was sure Nick would like—apple-green silky stuff, narrow black velvet ribbon at the throat and wrists; very French; youthful and charming. Her face was glowing—no need for rouge—when Nicholas walked into her drawing-room.

He, if anything, was paler than usual. His dark eyes looked very dark. There was an almost distraught look about him. After Parkes announced him and had shut the door behind him, Nicholas stood still a moment, staring at Eve. She was the first to speak. She said:

"Oh, my dear . . ."

He walked up to her then, and took her hands, crushed the palms against his lips. They felt hot and dry.

"Heavenly thing," he said.

Her whole body ached with happiness.

"Then you do love me still?"

"I love you," he said simply. "And, if I didn't love you so much, I'd carry on with this affair till all was blue. I could go on seeing you and adoring you for ever, I think, without feeling satiated or tired. But I do love you, Eve. And, because I do, I'm damned if I'm going to smirch you—yes, smirch is the only word—by carrying on a sordid intrigue with you. This has got to be good-bye."

She did not answer. She stood motionless. All through his little speech—delivered in his rapid, impulsive fashion—she kept her large hazel eyes fixed steadily upon him. Her hands held on to his very tightly. The colour faded gradually from her cheeks. He went on:

"Then there's Michael. He's such a damn good fellow. He's my friend, my colleague. I'd be hounded out of the

hospital, and rightly too, for making love to his wife, if the others knew."

"But they . . . don't know—they won't know," she said, with sudden, painful precision.

"But I know it in my heart. I'm not being dramatic or hysterical. I'm only trying to tell you what I feel. Already I've grossly betrayed your husband's trust and friendship. But it can't—it mustn't happen again."

"Come and sit down," she said unevenly.

"I can't sit down, darling," he said. "Let me walk about. Let's both smoke."

She accepted the cigarette he gave her and lighted for her. She balanced herself on the edge of the sofa. He walked up and down the golden room, and she watched him. She did not argue or protest against anything he said, for the moment. She listened to him silently. The faun-like lips were drawn, repressed. She could see that he suffered. It never entered her head once to suspect that yesterday's intimacy had made him love her less. It appeared to have made him love her more. For that she was supremely thankful. But that he had come definitely to put an end to their affair, she could not doubt. She did not even suppose she could make him alter his resolutions, such as they were, even if she tried. But she felt a kind of cold despair steal over her while she listened to him.

He talked of his regard for Michael, the debt he owed him. He talked of her particular position—the impossibility of it all.

"Either it means that we would go on . . . secretly meeting, secretly being lovers until we were found out," he said. "That would be so beastly. So unfair to you. You're worth more than that. Or it means that we bolt, now . . . right away. That's impossible. I couldn't take you away from Graham. I've done him harm enough. Even supposing we were selfish enough to quit for the sake of our own personal happiness, I couldn't offer you a home like this—" he spread his thin, sensitive hands round the room—"I've practically nothing. . . . Seven hundred pounds a-year is nothing to you . . . and it would end my career as a surgeon, and mean I could never earn anything more. I loathe talking about money, but you see, don't you, dear, that it is necessary."

She drew a long sigh. She tried hard to speak as calmly as he had done.

"Yes. I see that. Of course, as far as money is concerned, I don't want it. If I had you, Nick, being poor wouldn't matter."

He threw away his cigarette. She laid hers in a tray. He came up to her and took her hands, kissed them with passion.

"Oh, my darling, it's dear of you, but it does matter. I know that. I'd be miserable if I took you out of a luxurious home and put you in one where you had to be very careful with money."

"Well, we won't argue about that," she said painfully. "That doesn't seem to come into it, really. The great barrier is—Michael."

"You agree with me about him?"

"Entirely, of course."

"I wouldn't hesitate to ask you to come with me, darling, if he were a different sort of fellow."

"I know. We both know."

"And we can't carry on a sordid intrigue which would—could only end in us being found out."

She was shivering violently now.

"Yes, it is unthinkable. This morning—I—oh, it was awful, Nick. . . ." She told him about the incident of the coat, the smell of ether, Michael's cross-questioning, her own torn nerves. She added miserably: "It couldn't go on, of course. And yet, I cannot imagine life without you."

"Nor I without you, Eve."

He dropped her hands, and turned from her, pressing his hands to his head.

"How cruel it is. Yesterday has only made me want you more—much more. I wish it had never happened."

"But I don't," she said passionately. "I'm glad. If I never feel your arms around me again, I shall have that to remember. Our one hour, my darling."

He swung round, his pale face ardent, but without colour—the fire behind the screen, still glowing, leaping. The next moment she was in his arms. He kissed her wildly—a torrent of kisses that stung little red marks on her face and left her breathless.

"I love you, I love you. Eve, oh, I shall never, never be able to tell you how I love you. I shall always think of you as my star; the one perfect being for me."

She clung to him, pulling his head down to hers. Tears ran down her cheeks.

"Nick, how can we give each other up?"

"We must, we must, my dear."

"I suppose we must," she said desolately.

"Don't cry, darling. You make me feel I've brought nothing but misery into your life."

"You haven't. You've given me the greatest happiness I've ever known or ever will know."

"You've given me everything, Eve—everything."

"And I'd give everything again and again . . . if it were possible. Nick, at least you'll know there will never be anybody else."

"Yes, I believe that. I believe in your love," he said. He stroked the hair back from her hot forehead. "I believe you. I shall certainly never care for any woman again as I care for you, beloved."

She gave a twisted little smile, wiping the tears away with the back of her hand—like a child, an unhappy child, he thought, and hugged her closer.

"I shan't ask you to love nobody but me," she said. "Of course you will. You must : . . you'll marry one day."

"I can't even think of it."

"But you will."

"Don't talk about marriage. It's intolerable to me, Eve. It's you I want, and love."

"You know how I feel," she whispered. "Nick, Nick, darling, how can we go on meeting—as friends?"

"We've got to. Darling, this is where you're going to show just what you're worth. You're plucky. No, it's no good belittling yourself to me. You've got to act a part. Wipe out yesterday . . ."

"It's impossible," she said, in a hoarse little voice. Her hands gripped his shoulders. "It's impossible, Nick. How can we wipe it out?"

"We can't, actually. But we've just got to pull ourselves together and try our utmost to be friends. Later, if I see it's hopeless, I'll make up some desperate tale and throw up the consulting-room in Queen Anne Street,

and leave the hospital—practise in some other part of England.”

“I see,” she said, choking.

“Don’t you think that’s best?”

“I suppose so. I feel as though I’ve ruined your career.”

“Of course you haven’t, silly child.”

He cupped her face in his hands; gave her a long, long look. Then he kissed her twice, lingeringly, on the mouth.

“You poor, poor darling. It’s all rotten for you. Worse for you than for me. I’m alone. But you’ve got to play a part . . . for him.”

She shivered; clung closely to him.

“Nick, if only it could have been different.”

“If only!” he echoed.

“Put your arms around me again—please.”

He did so, with more tenderness than passion, now. He kissed her wet lashes, her hair.

“Darling, darling, we must try.”

“Yes,” she said. “We must try.”

“You’re perfectly ripping; I admire you from the bottom of my heart.”

“Me? When I’ve been so weak . . .”

“But now you’re so strong.”

“I’m not really,” she said. “You’d better leave me, Nick, before I go down on my knees and implore you to take me away.”

“Don’t do that; if you did, God knows what I’d do . . . when I adore you. But we must do the decent thing by him.”

“But we can’t wipe out yesterday, anyhow, Nick!” she said, in a muffled voice.

“No, I know.” He held her head close to his shoulder and laid his cheek against the softness of her hair. “It was too much for us. We couldn’t help that. But it mustn’t ever happen again.”

Silence a moment. Both of them torn with memories—suffering. Then he said:

“I feel horribly depressed. As though something frightful might happen.”

“What?” She looked up at him. “Don’t frighten me, Nick. What might happen?”

“I honestly can’t explain what I feel. But, as I said

yesterday, one pays for madness. We're both trying not to hurt Michael. But there will always be—yesterday."

"He can never find out. Nobody can!"

"No. I suppose not."

His face was haggard and tired.

He put her gently away from him. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"No—do," she said, in a small voice.

He lit a cigarette, offered her one, but she refused. She sat on the edge of the sofa. Mechanically she lifted the Venetian doll in her arms and played with it. She looked so young, so unhappy, so much like a heart-broken child, that he could scarcely endure the thought of leaving her. He began to pace up and down the room again, battling with himself. At last he came up to her.

"Eve, beloved. I'm not quite mad. But will you give me—your doll?"

"My doll. This Venetian lady?"

"Yes. It's a funny little image of you as I remember you in your black velvet dress. It has your perfume. I'd like to keep it—always."

The tears rushed to her eyes again.

"You darling, Nick—wanting that absurd thing. But you shall have her. . . ."

"I'll send you another one."

"You needn't."

"I'd like to. And I'll swear nobody but myself will ever see this one."

He put an arm about her and held her close. Just for an instant she raised her head, and put her lips to his. They kissed desperately. Then she said:

"You'd better go away. We've made up our minds to do the right thing. But I swear I shan't be brave for long."

"Yes, you will. You're wonderful," he said.

He kissed her hair. Released her. Put the Venetian doll in her arms.

"Post it to my rooms at Earl's Court, dearest. I can't very well take it away with me. Good-bye."

She gripped the sofa hard. She felt a terrible kind of despair, of grief that he was going, and that they must never meet as lovers again.

"Nick," she said. "Nick . . ."

"I'll love you always, darling," he said. "And I will try not to see you often—for both our sakes. You must help me to be brave. I'm pretty well finished, now. . . . I'd better go out and get drunk."

"That wouldn't be good for your reputation as a surgeon."

"Damn that. Damn everything."

He moved away from her, face colourless.

"Good-bye, my dear."

She did not answer. He went quickly out of the room. He did not trust himself to stay with her any longer.

She sat where he had left her, balancing herself on the arm of the sofa, the doll in her arms. Her face was pinched, screwed up as though she were going to cry again. She told herself, in a dazed sort of way, that she supposed he would come back if she called him, told him she could not, would not put an end to their love. But she didn't make any effort to call him back—because of Michael. Poor Michael. It was funny to think that Michael, whose first thought in life had always been her happiness, should be the one object in the way of her happiness. She loved Nicholas Rayne—really loved him as she had never loved any human being on earth before. But when they met again, it must be as friends.

After yesterday!

Somebody knocked on the door.

"Come in," she said.

Parkes entered, his long melancholy face, with its side whiskers and rather jaundiced eyes, impassive as usual.

"A wire for you, madam."

She took the orange envelope without interest; opened the flap; read the typewritten words on the thin narrow blue strip of paper, read them twice with a sense of shock and sorrow, completely removed from Nick and their love and passion. It said:

Come at once Daddy had stroke not expected live the night. MUMMY.

3

Giles Walton-Evans died that same day, before his daughter had time to reach him.

When Eve arrived at Haywards Heath it was only to be plunged into chaos and grief. Her father had, apparently, been quite well earlier in the morning. He had been down in the "plantation," feeding his Chinese pheasants. The head gardener had heard him call, and found him lying on the ground unconscious. Reggie Coleman had come at once; a big Brighton man followed. But no medical aid could save Giles Walton-Evans. His time had come. He never regained consciousness. When Eve arrived she found her mother giving way to terrible, hysterical grief. The servants were equally hysterical. It fell to Eve's share to quieten them all down and restore some order in the house. It seemed strange to her to find herself having to take command like this in her old home. But Beatrice Walton-Evans, suffering from shock, and confident, now that her husband was dead, that she had always adored him, lost all self-control, and surrendered to the same sort of unrestrained grief to which she had given way when Eric was killed in the war. She became a pitiable, moaning, shivering creature, and clung to Eve for support.

Eve wept with her mother. At the same time she saw that it was necessary for someone to take control in the stricken household. So she did it. Eve could always rise to an occasion. And, in a way, although she only vaguely realised it, it was the best thing that could have happened to her. It took her mind off herself—her own troubles. It gave her something to do. She thought incessantly of her lover; wanted him. But she was a long way removed from him here, in her old home. Nick had no place here. It was Michael who had place. She was quite glad to see Michael when he came down to Haywards Heath as soon as he could get away from hospital. At a time like this he was a tower of strength—quiet, calm, unmoved.

He took most of the burden from Eve's shoulders as soon as he arrived. He was the only person with any real power to soothe his mother-in-law, who, he saw at once, had gone to bits. Michael had a very gentle, soothing influence. He was also essentially a doctor. From the time he came, Mrs. Walton-Evans was better. By dinner-time she was tucked up in her bed, had taken the bromide her son-in-law had given her, and was sleeping.

Reggie Coleman hung round the house, his round cheery face grave and puckered. He greatly regretted the death of the old man who had been a good friend to him. He was anxious to help Mrs. Walton-Evans and Eve in any way he could. But he could do nothing.

"You've been a brick, but there isn't anything more to be done now," Michael told his old colleague, when he accompanied him to the front door to see him out. "I'm just going to get Eve off to bed now. She's done in."

"She's been marvellous," said Reggie, with enthusiasm.

"Yes, she is splendid," said Michael.

He returned to the drawing-room where Eve was sitting. There was nothing very splendid or heroic about her just now. She was tired and forlorn and ready to cry. When Michael started to praise her for what she had done, she looked up at him in astonishment.

"I—why I've done nothing. Poor old Mummy. It's been an awful shock for her. And poor Daddy—he looked so healthy and well. Who would have dreamed it?"

"No. I'm dreadfully sorry about it, darling. I was very attached to your father."

"He loved you," she said mechanically.

"Funny how the ones who look so well go off so easily," he said.

"I saw him when I first arrived," said Eve. "He looked so strange. The dead seem utterly detached—almost disdainful of life once they've left it, don't they?"

"They always look at peace, darling. I think they are."

"I wonder what it means . . . where they go . . . where Daddy is now," she said, in a small, frightened voice.

"Mike, I'm terrified of dying, myself."

"Why? Silly child!"

"Aren't you?"

"Not a bit."

"You wouldn't be, of course. You're so good. But I—oh, I don't know. Perhaps it's because I'm wicked." She gave an hysterical little laugh. "Afraid to die . . ."

"But you're not wicked, and you're not going to die just yet. Darling girl, you're terribly tired. Come along and let me put you to bed, and we'll get Ethel to bring you up some soup or something."

He put an arm about her. She put her cigarette down

and suddenly clung to him, sobbing. He held her close, laid his cheek against her hair. In his eyes lay a look of pleasure and peace. She was his—this frightened, weeping child. More his than she had been for long years. She did not resist him when he picked her up, carried her upstairs, and laid her on the bed in her old room. As he placed her there, he smiled down at her.

"D'you remember when I last did this—carried you up like this and put you on this bed?"

"M'm," she said. She blew her nose. "After I fainted . . . the first night I met you."

He kissed her hand dumbly.

A frightful sensation of her unworthiness gripped her. If he knew—knew how she had repaid his love, his devotion, knew how much she wanted Nick, even now! But she seized his hand and laid it against her cheek, made it wet with her tears.

"Darling Michael," she said.

"I'll go down and get you something to drink," he said.

"All right," she said.

"And, darling—by the way——" He paused at the door. "I saw Rayne at the hospital just before I came away."

"Yes?" She put the back of her hand across her eyes. Her heart gave a wild throb.

"He sent you his sympathy. He was so sorry to hear about your father."

"Thank you," said Eve.

After he had gone she turned over on the bed and hid her face in the pillow. She did not cry any more. But she felt unutterably tired. And she knew that she wanted Nick—almost unbearably.

4

About two months later, Michael arranged to take Eve abroad for three weeks' holiday.

Giles Walton-Evans had been laid in his last resting-place.

Mrs. Walton-Evans, a subdued, pathetic little creature in heavy widow's weeds, spent a trying month with her

husband's solicitors, and disposed of her home. Eve was quite sad to see it go; sad to have to sell her father's beloved fancy pheasants, hand his beloved prize roses over to strangers. Michael refused to let the dogs and the shooting go. He took these over himself.

"I can always run down in September and October for a day's shooting," he told his wife. "I'll keep on the old shoot, and Hayling."

"I'm sure poor old Daddy will be glad," Eve said, with tears in her eyes. "If anything could wake him from his last long sleep it would be the sound of a gun."

Mrs. Walton-Evans was now in London in a furnished flat. That ambition, at least, was realised—to lead a quiet and dignified life in London.

"And I've no one but you left, so I like to be near you, dear," she told Eve.

Eve was very patient with her mother nowadays. She was growing more and more tolerant with the passing of the years. Her mother could still irritate her in more ways than one, but she felt that in these days the petty jealousies and stupidities which had roused her temper in the past could scarcely touch her. Life held such much bigger troubles, griefs more real, and trials more difficult to endure.

She had only seen Nick twice since her father's death. He came once to express his sympathy and bring her some flowers; once to thank her, in guarded language, for the Venetian doll, which she posted him as promised. Both times she only saw him alone for a fraction of an instant, otherwise Michael was present.

Eve had another toy now, much more precious to her. It had come mysteriously through the post one morning. Not a Venetian lady this time, but an Italian one, with a white haunting face, silky black head, and wonderfully expressive eyes. It wore a scarlet crinoline dress with little velvet flowers and a black lace mantilla. A fascinating toy. Nick must have sent to Paris specially for it.

And because he had given it to her, and because it was Italian and had a pale poetic face and black hair, she adored it absurdly. But it did not loll amongst the cushions in her drawing-room. It sat on her bed all day,

matching the black and scarlet room, and at night on her table, beside the lamp.

Seeing Nick at intervals, never really alone, so near, so dear and desirable, yet so very far removed from her, hurt her frantically. She could scarcely sit still in the room with him and listen to his voice and watch his swift, familiar movements. It was all so familiar . . . every gesture of the hand . . . every movement of his head . . . every smile. And she had to talk to him in a calm, detached way, guard her every look or word in order that Michael should suspect nothing. A horrible effort. She knew, instinctively, that it was an effort for Nick, too. He was much more than usually restless, talked a lot, laughed a lot, refused to meet her gaze.

One evening, after he had gone, Michael said :

" Rayne's not looking at all well, is he ? "

" Isn't he ? " Eve said.

" No. We've all been wondering at the hospital what's wrong with him. He never stops working. Doing much too much."

" Oh," said Eve. " I thought he was all right." Casually ; her gaze fixed on a magazine ; but every nerve in her quivering. The insane longing to say : " I know what's wrong . . . he wants me . . . needs me, as I want and need him. We're madly in love, and trying to be good because of you. It's killing us both."

But she said nothing.

The next time he came, Anne Flaming was in the house in Bedford Gardens. That night it was even more difficult for Eve to conceal her feelings, because Anne's grave dark eyes seemed to see and know everything. Anne was so much more subtle and discerning than her brother. Eve scarcely dared look at Nick once during the evening, for fear that her eyes would betray her . . . to Anne.

When the two women were alone in Eve's bedroom, much later, Eve embarked on the subject of Nick, because something wild and desperate compelled her to.

" What do you think of Mr. Rayne, Anne ? "

" I think he is charming," said Anne. " A most brilliant, entertaining young man."

Eve, sitting on her bed, rubbing cream into her face, stared at the floor.

"Yes. He is . . . very brilliant."

Anne came and sat beside her, looking at her with her large grave eyes.

"Eve, my child, you've got something on your mind. What is it?"

Eve looked up in a startled way, her pale face flushing.

"Nothing . . . nothing at all."

"I don't want you to tell me if you'd rather not, my dear," said Anne. "But I know you're worried. I've noticed it all to-day."

Eve caught her lip between her teeth. Then, suddenly, racked with the pain of her thoughts, flung herself forward on the bed, and put her head in Anne's lap.

"There is something. But I can't tell you . . . but help me, Anne . . . help me to be strong."

Anne put a hand on the bent, brown head.

"To be strong, darling? But you are strong. You are perfectly sweet with Michael nowadays. I've noticed it."

"I haven't been sweet. I've been a rotter, Anne. Anne, I always told you I didn't deserve Mike's love. . . . I warned you I'd let him down."

"You haven't let him down, Eve."

"I have. Oh, for God's sake, don't be angry with me, and don't say anything to a living soul . . . but I *have* let him down."

Dead silence. Anne Flaming sat very still, her hand on Eve's hair. Eve looked up, her face distorted.

"Don't make me explain. Anne, you're so wonderful. You understand everything . . . try and forgive this, and understand."

"I think I do," said Anne quietly. "It's Nicholas Rayne."

"Yes."

"Oh, my dear . . ."

"Yes, I know, I'm unspeakable . . . but I couldn't help it, Anne. I loved him so. I still do. But I love Michael . . . in my way . . . another way. And I'm trying to get over it . . . to be a good wife to Michael. I'm trying, Anne."

Silence again. Anne's gentle hand went on stroking Eve's head. Her beautiful eyes were melancholy, but they held nothing but tenderness. Eve looked up again.

"You despise me? You must. You're so controlled, and so like Michael, yourself."

"I don't despise you, Eve. Indeed I don't. Oh, you poor, poor child . . . I do understand. Two impulsive, brilliant people—you and Nicholas Rayne—like two flames meeting. Impossible that they shouldn't become one."

"You realise that? You understand . . . you, Michael's own sister?" Eve said incredulously.

"Being his sister doesn't make me a prig or a fool, my dear. I know what human nature is. But being his sister and very, very fond of him does make me anxious for him . . . for his happiness."

"Anne, I'm trying . . ."

"I can see that, my dear. So is Mr. Rayne. But he ought to go away."

"He can't. It's so difficult. He and Michael work together."

Anne sighed deeply.

"It's pretty bad, isn't it? All round."

Eve clung to her, sobbing desperately.

"Help me, Anne . . . help me to make Michael happy and not to destroy him."

"I'll do anything I can, always. You know you can rely on me."

"I know you're a saint," said Eve. "The most understanding, human creature on earth. You ought to loathe me."

"But I don't. . . ." Anne gathered her close. "You poor, miserable child. I only ask you to keep on trying hard . . . to make my poor old boy happy."

"I will," said Eve. "Anne, I swear I will."

"But if you and Nicholas Rayne go on seeing each other . . . I rather tremble, Eve."

"Michael is taking me to the Italian lakes soon," said Eve, in a suffocated voice. "Perhaps when I come back . . . things will be easier."

"I hope so, my dear," said Anne.

"Oh, Anne, thank you for being so decent to me. I've wanted someone to tell . . . so badly."

And it was so easy to tell Anne Flaming things, just because she asked no questions, and had none of that morbid

and insatiable curiosity for details that most women possess.

Perhaps it eased Eve's conscience a little, that sudden, heart-broken confession to Anne. But it could not ease her pain. She surrounded herself with a hundred wishes to be kind to Michael and make him happy. She fortified herself by making countless sacrifices for him; almost succeeded in making him think she was happy with him again. But always, through the pitiful fortifications, broke the enemy . . . self . . . the self that wanted Nick—wanted him until she thought she would go mad.

Then, three days before Eve and Michael were due to start off on their holiday, disaster came upon them all, almost before they were aware of it. . . .

Michael was called out to the hospital after dinner, and Eve always remembered that it was a wonderful June night of stars and moonshine—not in the least the sort of night for a catastrophe. He came home later, wandered into the drawing-room, and told her that he had very distressing news for her.

"Distressing news? Good gracious, Mike . . . what?"

Michael looked worried—unusually so for him.

"It's about Nick Rayne."

And then the world spun round Eve. She sat very still, very rigid on the piano stool; hands gripping the sides of it; face white; eyes big and frightened.

"About Nick? But what?—is he ill?"

"I'm afraid he is. Very."

Eve felt suddenly sick.

"Nick very ill. But since when? I don't understand. I haven't heard before. . . ." She was trying so hard to speak calmly. But to herself she was crying: "Nick very ill . . . oh, God . . . Nick, my Nick . . ."

"I'm sure you'll be sorry, darling," came Michael's calm voice. "Although you don't seem to have been as interested in him lately as you used to be."

She could have laughed with the irony of that. She stood up, straight, quivering. She looked young and thin in her sleeveless frock of black chiffon. Michael noticed suddenly how thin she had grown. There were hollows in her neck.

"But Nick was such a charming fellow," he added,

"and such a promising surgeon. It seems an awful tragedy."

"Michael," said Eve. Her voice sounded miles from her. "Are you trying to tell me that Nick is . . . dead? Or is this a joke?"

"A joke!" he repeated. He stared at her in quite a horrified way. "Heavens, no. Nick isn't dead. But he's very near it."

Her knees seemed to give way. She clutched the piano . . . made a discordant sound on the keys. She said:

"Very near it. Since when? Has he had an accident? What is it? Oh, tell me, quickly."

He was genuinely astonished by her hysterical manner. He frowned as he answered:

"He has been ill all this week. I thought I mentioned it. Did I forget to tell you? He pricked his finger during an examination. He got general blood-poisoning. Been in bed at home. Didn't say anything to anybody till a couple of days ago. Can't think why not. But he's been rather funny lately . . . sort of absent-minded and queer. He did not seem to care whether he was ill or well."

Eve licked her dry lips.

"How bad is he?" she demanded.

"Very bad indeed, Eve. His temperature this evening was 105, and they're all very worried about him at the hospital."

"Where is he?" Her whole body shook.

"He was taken from his digs to Bart's this morning. In a private ward. Wanted to go to his old hospital. He got his degree at Bart's."

She stared at him. Nick . . . in hospital . . . with general blood-poisoning . . . and in a grave condition. . . . Nick . . . possibly dying. All her control, all the will in the world to spare Michael, suddenly collapsed under the terrific strain of this. She gave a gasping sob.

"And nobody told me. I didn't know. Nick . . . Nick . . ." she broke off, putting a handkerchief to her lips. "Is he going to die? Tell me . . . you must tell me," she added.

Michael stood very still. He stared at her. His mild blue eyes were changing. The surprised expression had become an astounded, almost horrified one. . . . He could not take

his gaze from his wife's face. The despair, the fear written upon that white mask appalled him. At last he said slowly :

"I don't really know. I expect a telephone call from Bart's in a few moments. I was there an hour or two ago, and they promised to 'phone me. I didn't say much to you at first because I didn't think you would be so interested. But now, of course, he is seriously ill. Left it too late before he sent for anyone at hospital."

"Is he conscious?"

"No. At least he didn't know me when I went to see him. He was delirious. They said he seemed to have no stamina—nothing to help him. All that vitality of his had gone. He was played out."

"You mean he is dying. I must go to him at once—at once!" she said hoarsely.

"Eve," said Michael. He still stared at her. His eyes were stricken, his long, fair face almost as pale as hers, but he spoke very quietly. "Why do you want to go to Rayne? Why are you behaving like this? Are you *in love with him*?"

"Yes." Eve shook from head to foot as she answered her husband. She was incapable of lying now. She felt like a frenzied creature . . . hunted . . . trapped. . .

"Yes," she repeated, "I am."

"Good God," said Michael.

She caught his arm.

"Michael, if you have any love for me, please take me to Nick. I love him terribly and he loves me. Take me to him or let me go. I must see him before he dies."

Michael did not move. He was like a figure of stone. But a look of bewilderment had come across his face. He seemed puzzled by her . . . by what she said. Seemed to be seeking in his own mind for reasons . . . explanations of this.

The telephone-bell rang. Eve let her fingers fall from Michael's arm.

"That may be the hospital," she said under her breath.

"I'll go and see," he said.

He left her standing there, her arms at her sides. She could not quite credit the fact that Nick was so seriously ill. It was too sudden. She had seen him last a week ago, when they had met at Mary Caley's house. He had seemed

perfectly well . . . then. They had avoided each other as usual . . . tried not even to look at each other. But when they were side by side for a moment, in the crowd, his hand had touched hers. He had given her one of his swift, revealing smiles, his eyes darkly passionate and unhappy.

She had not seen him since then. She asked herself, with an appalling sensation of grief, if that had really been their last meeting on earth. If that was the last time she would ever see his faun-like smile, feel the brilliant vital charm of him. It couldn't be. She told herself that it mustn't be. Nick mustn't die. She must see him again. . . . He wouldn't die, of course. Impossible to imagine Nick anything but splendidly alive.

Then Michael came back into the room.

She looked at him. His face betrayed nothing. He never did give away a secret. That had always irritated her in the past. But his eyes were very grave. She felt certain that he had nothing good to tell her. She said :

"Well. How is he?"

When he failed to answer, she knew, beyond doubt, that his news was going to be bad. The golden room danced round her.

"Michael . . . tell me . . . how is he?"

"I'm sorry, Eve . . ." he said with difficulty. "It's dreadful. Poor old Rayne."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes. He died half an hour ago."

"Oh," said Eve in a stifled voice. She was shuddering violently. "Oh, Nick . . . Nick . . ."

Michael did not attempt to touch her. He only stared at her miserably. Rayne was dead, and there had been something between Rayne and his wife . . . something which he had not known until to-night. It was a horrible shock to him. Never very good at expressing his feelings, he felt utterly dumb about this—tongue-tied. He could only stare at his wife, and feel embarrassed by the awful anguish that he saw on her face.

He thought, first of all, that she was going to faint. But Eve did not faint. A sudden, frightful sort of calm descended on her. She felt numbed by suffering. She felt that she had suffered like this twice. Once when Nick had said good-bye to her, when she had lost him because he had

no right to stay . . . and now . . . now that she had lost him through death.

Then, suddenly, Eve walked straight past Michael to the door, opened it, passed out, closed it behind her. A few seconds later he heard her bedroom door close. Footsteps overhead. The sound of the footsteps ceased. Everything was very silent. The silence of death itself over the little house wherein Michael lived and had loved and been happy. The house where Eve lived and had loved and been happy, too. But she had not loved him. She had loved Nicholas Rayne. If she had known any happiness, it must have been with Rayne. Poor Rayne who was dead.

Poor Eve who was alive.

Michael sat down heavily on the sofa, and put his head between his hands.

5

Michael sat there, brooding, thinking, for nearly an hour. He seemed unconscious of time. But at last he looked up to see the drawing-room door open. Eve walked in. She looked deathly white. Her eyes were rimmed with red. She had been crying violently. But now she appeared to be quite calm. She was still in her black chiffon dinner dress.

She came straight up to her husband and stood before him.

"I had to come," she said. Her voice was hoarse, but steady. "I couldn't possibly go through the whole night before we—have had it out, Michael."

He looked up at her dully.

"Have it out?" he repeated.

"Yes. I must tell you everything now."

"I don't think I want to hear."

"Don't be ridiculous, Michael," said Eve, quite calmly.

"You've got to hear now."

"Why?"

"Obviously. You know . . . so much."

"But I don't know that I want to hear any more."

"But you must," she said, with sudden violence. "I can't go away until I've told you."

He turned round, hands in his pockets. His long fair face looked strange to her, sombre, bitter. Strange and rather terrible to see bitterness on Michael's face.

"Were you going away?" he asked.

"Of course," she said in a tone of surprise. "I—didn't for a moment expect you'd want me to stay after . . . after what I told you."

"But you didn't tell me much."

"I told you that I . . . was in love with Nick." Her voice trembled a little now, and she clenched both hands nervously behind her back. "That he—loved me."

A painful flush reddened Michael's whole face. He stared at the floor.

"Yes. And he's dead."

She shuddered.

"That can't alter the fact that we loved each other."

"No. But it doesn't mean, necessarily, that you have to go away."

"You mean you don't want me to go?" she said, with genuine astonishment.

"No," said Michael slowly. "I don't think I do. What good can it do? Where can you go?"

"I don't know," she closed her tired sore eyes a moment. Even the soft amber light in her golden room hurt her eyes. She wanted to shut out the sight of all the things in the room. Things *he* had loved, and so often handled. The piano which he had played. She could see him there, terribly real and alive—Nick playing that piano. She could feel his presence, vital, gay, brilliant. Nick, with his swift-changing moods, swift-moving hands and feet, black eyes laughing at her from his pale fine-cut face. Nick, with his sensitive, wonderful hands, his wonderful Byronic head. Nick, dancing with her. Nick, in all his variety of moods—every one dear and familiar. Nick—dearest mood of all—serious, passionate, his black head bent over hers, his lips against her throat.

"Oh, God, God," she said, half aloud, and put her face in her hands. If she could only forget Nick for one moment. If she could only forget that he was lying dead . . . dead and cold and still, like Daddy had lain. Her imagination was only too vivid. Terrible and incredible to contemplate that he would never move, live, laugh, or love again.

She tried hard to drag her mind back to Michael—poor old Michael—and the future. But nothing seemed to

matter except that Nick had died ; died suddenly, terribly, before she had even had time to hear of his illness. Just a cut . . . a careless examination . . . blood-poisoning. And he was gone. . . . He had been queer, absent-minded lately, so Michael had said. Of course. He had not been himself. He had been eating out his heart for her. That was what her love had done for him. It had killed him. Yes ; their brief, tempestuous passion had been tragic and fatal to Nick. She felt, in some terrible, remote way, responsible for his death.

Upstairs, for the last hour, she had cried for him. Cried . . . cried . . . cried. She had railed against Fate . . . railed against Death . . . Death, the monster who had most monstrosly swallowed up her Nick. As if there weren't enough victims for Death . . . enough aged, sickly people, dead and dying . . . without Nick having to go, Nick who was so gloriously alive.

But now she had come down to talk to Michael, tell him everything before she went away, because she felt she owed him the whole truth now. But he didn't seem eager to hear it. He was funny. He had always been funny, hard to understand. Who could fathom the slow, deep workings of Michael's mind?

She uncovered her face, and looked at him.

She felt very old—years and years older than she really was. Michael met her gaze, and looked away swiftly, as though the sight of her face embarrassed him. She did look old. She was not the young, childish wife of his imagination any longer. In fact she was altogether another Eve—an Eve he had not known had existed. This Eve was not a gay, thoughtless girl incapable of any deep passion. She was a woman capable of very deep passion . . . terrible love. Yes, her love for Rayne must have been terrible, otherwise she could not look like this. Broken and defeated by his death.

"Michael," she said, breaking the long silence between them. "I'd better go to Mummy. I expect when I tell her about it all she won't want me long. She'll be so shocked. I hate the idea of upsetting her so soon after Daddy's death, but where else can I go?"

"You don't need to go anywhere, Eve," he said. "You can stay here. This is your home."

"But Michael," she said. "You can't want me to stay . . . you don't know everything yet."

He flushed scarlet again.

"I don't want to know." He spoke violently—with queer violence for Michael. His eyes were almost sullen, resentful. "I don't want to know. It's all over now. What the hell is the good of dragging up the ghastly details? It can't do any of us any good, can it?"

She blinked slowly, as though the sound of that queer, loud, violent voice perplexed her. It wasn't Michael speaking at all. She shook her head.

"I don't understand . . . that you don't want to know."

"I know enough. I can guess the rest. But I'd rather not hear," he said, still very loudly. "Rayne's dead. If he hadn't died things might have been different. I dare say the whole show would have smashed up sooner or later."

"No," she said under her breath. "No, Michael. We didn't mean you—ever to know."

"Well, then it would have gone on behind my back." His lips almost sneered. She stared at him and saw, suddenly, how she had hurt him, how dreadfully he must be hurt to sneer like that.

"That's not true. You don't want to hear everything. I don't understand you, but, if you don't, there it is. Only you must give the devil his due. Nick and I had no intention of carrying on behind your back. We were trying . . . trying not to love each other. We kept away. He kept away. That's why he didn't come so often. We were trying . . . we *were*, Michael. You must believe that!"

Her voice had risen. She looked wild-eyed, distraught. She was shaking. Michael's heart seemed to give a great throb of pain. He had loved this wife of his more than anybody, anything on earth. He had realised for some time that she was no longer in love with him. But never, never once had he imagined that she would fall in love with any other man. Never suspected her and Rayne. When she had betrayed herself to-night, after hearing his bad news about Nicholas, it had been like a blow across the face to him—a frightful blow. It had never occurred to

him that Eve would do a thing like that. Or Rayne . . . Rayne, who had been his friend.

Eve's confession about Rayne—the knowledge that she and Rayne had been secret lovers—had not killed Michael's love. Only for the moment it had made him bitter and resentful; had astonished him, horribly. But now he felt only an intense sadness when he looked at Eve and saw how she suffered, an immense compassion more for her than for himself.

He knew her nature pretty well after five years of marriage with her. He knew that, despite all her faults and follies, she was fundamentally straight and decent and truthful. It must have hurt and worried her dreadfully to carry on an intrigue behind his back. It must have been ghastly for her to pretend to be cheerful and normal—to be patient with him and kind to him—when all the time she was in love with Rayne, wanting him.

She said she had tried to fight it, that they had both tried. Yes, he could believe that. He understood, now, why Nick had avoided the house. Not because he and Eve had quarrelled, but because they had loved. Poor Rayne. Dynamic, brilliant fellow . . . too temperamental . . . his own worst enemy. Yet so lovable. Everybody at the hospital had liked him; all the nurses adored him. Michael asked himself how he could really blame Eve for falling under that magic spell which Rayne wove for most people. It had been largely his fault. He had thrown them together, encouraged their friendship. After all, hadn't he been a poor, conceited sort of fool to imagine that Eve would never care for any man except himself? He hadn't made life very amusing for her. He was a dull, dumb fellow. He knew it. And Rayne—Rayne had been the reverse. Poor old Rayne . . . twenty-eight . . . with the world his oyster . . . and dead.

He suddenly took Eve's hands. They were cold and trembling. He pressed them hard.

"Darling," he said. The old voice—the old, kindly Michael whom she knew. "It's been damnable . . . a ghastly sort of affair. I wish to God it had never happened . . . but what's the use of wishing that?"

"Yes—what's the use?" she said tragically. "But we did try, Michael . . . we did. . . ."

"I know you did," he said. And then, curiously: "If you were so much in love, you two, why didn't you bolt?"

"Because of you."

"Me? Why did I come into it?"

"Because—although this may sound idiotic—I love you, Mike, in my way, and I didn't want to hurt you. Nick felt like that too."

Michael's eyes looked suffused. He bent his head.

"I see," he said. "That was decent of you both."

"No, no, we . . . Michael, I'm not going to let you think——"

"Don't!" he broke in. He pressed her fingers till she winced with the pain. "For the love of God, don't, Eve. I tell you, I don't want to hear. I understand."

"Oh, very well," she said painfully.

"And now I want to tell you something," he said. "It's all over. Rayne is dead, and there isn't any use all of us throwing ourselves into passions and heroics. You've hurt me horribly, Eve, but I think I'm to blame . . . yes . . . I encouraged you to go about with Rayne. I ought to have seen. His music—everything—appealed to you . . . and, of course, you appealed to him. Well, it's all over and done with. Now, all I ask you is to try your utmost to forget it. To start again. I'll help you if I can. I'm not much good. You know that. But I love you, and we used to be happy. We were awfully happy that first year down at Pear-Tree Cottage, weren't we?"

He broke off, cleared his throat, his face hot, puckered. He seemed to her, suddenly, like a small schoolboy, unhappy, self-conscious, forlorn. The tragedy of the whole thing rushed across her; flung her, sobbing, broken, into his arms.

"Michael, Michael. I wish I were dead. I wish I had died before I hurt you. You're so kind and good. You're being much too good to me now. You ought to hate me, loathe me, send me away. Michael, I wish I'd never been born!"

Shuddering, gasping, she clung to him. And he put his arms around her, led her to the sofa, pulled her down beside him; sat with her thus—both of them huddled up in a close embrace, passionless, grief-stricken, like

two wretched children. She sobbed and sobbed with her face against his shoulder.

"Michael, I'm sorry. Oh, forgive me, forgive me!"

"I do, darling, from the bottom of my heart."

"Why should you be so good to me? I've done nothing, nothing but make you unhappy."

"No, you haven't. You've made me happy. I've never wanted anybody but you, Eve."

"I don't deserve it," she moaned. "Michael, there's nothing but truth between us now, and you know . . . darling Michael . . . I do love you, but only in my way. I'd like to tell you that it was *your* way, but I can't."

His face contracted. He hid it against her hair.

"I understand. I'm not asking you to."

"But I'll try to be a good wife to you. I'll try to forget *him*."

"If you can. Do let's try and begin again, Eve. It would be so terrible to separate. Do you want to leave me?"

"No," she whispered, holding on to him. "I don't. I want to stay. But you're too good. . . ."

"I'm a dull fool, darling, and I ought never to have married you and asked everything of you," he said, his face still hidden. "I've brought this all on myself."

"You aren't to take the blame," she said passionately. "I'm to blame entirely. You've been priceless to me . . . about everything. Michael, you're an absolute saint. Yes, you are, to me. I'll try to make you happy . . . to be like ~~we~~ used to be. Give me time—that's all."

"Of course—and Eve, don't think I don't feel grateful to you . . . and Rayne. . . ." His voice was husky. "For the way you both tried."

She did not answer. But she slid out of his arms on to the floor and crouched at his feet, arms about his knees, face buried on them. She felt broken and exhausted. She couldn't cry any more. She couldn't tell Michael half of what lay in her heart. Her longing for Nick—Nick who was dead—could not be stilled. Impossible to forget, to change in an hour or a day. But if Michael gave her time . . . time worked wonders . . . and even if she never forgot Nick . . . of course, she couldn't ever forget him . . . she might find peace and happiness with her husband.

There was nobody, nobody on earth, with such a large heart and divine generosity as Michael. She was almost awed by the thought of his goodness to-night, as she knelt there at his feet. Like Anne . . . Anne who had understood and forgiven.

"I'm not fit to belong to these two," she told herself desolately. "But I'll try—try to be worthy."

How lucky she was to be married to Michael—Michael who demanded so little and gave so much. And how glad she was now, that she and Nick had tried to do the right thing. The pain of loving and wanting Nick might go on—interminably—but peace would come . . . must come, with Michael to help her.

She would fail, many times. She was sure of that. Fail him. Fail herself. But, in the end, she would win through—because she wanted to; and because Nick had said, "*Be kind to him, beloved.*"

She seemed to feel suddenly that Nick was here, with her, that he would always be with her; only his poor body lay dead and finished; but his vital, compelling spirit was, must be, immortal. And it would go on . . . she would feel it . . . and it would help her.

She stretched her arms up to Michael. And she saw that his eyes were full of tears. She said huskily:

"We'll begin again, Michael darling, and I will try. . . ."

"I know you will," he said, and took her hands and held them very tightly.

"I don't wonder you're a great doctor, Michael," she said. "I think you certainly have the gift of healing."

"Children," he said, with a very faint smile.

"Children, yes. Oh, Mike, if we could only have a child. I think that would have made all the difference."

He sighed heavily.

"Yes, that's been rotten luck. But perhaps I've got my work cut out with you, darling. You're my child."

She laid her cheek against one of his hands.

"A bad, disappointing child, Michael."

"But the only one I've got," he said tenderly. He added: "Eve, it's very late."

"Is it? I didn't know."

"Past midnight. I'm going to carry you up to bed."

"Yes," she whispered.

"And we won't alter our plans. We'll go to Cadenabbia the day after to-morrow. The holiday will do us both good."

"Yes," she repeated.

She raised her head and, heavy-eyed, weary, stared round the room that Nick had loved. Stared at the piano—*his* piano. She would always think of it as his. An awful, tearing little pain gripped her heart.

"I mustn't think about him," she told herself. "It's my duty to Michael—not to, and Michael has been so good to me."

She felt her husband's arm about her. He helped her on to her feet, then lifted her right up in his arms. He carried her upstairs, switched on her table-lamp, and laid her on her bed; then he bent over her, and put his lips on her hair.

"Good night, darling. Try to sleep. Would you like some aspirin?"

"No. I'm frightfully tired. I shall sleep."

"God bless you," he said.

She answered him with emotion.

"God bless you. And thank you . . . frightfully . . . for everything. . . . You've been so marvellous to me."

"No, I haven't," he said.

He moved away, and went through the communicating door into his own room, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Eve drew the Italian doll that Nick had given her into her arms, held it tightly; lay very still, her eyes shut. For a moment she felt too exhausted to get up and undress. Outside she heard a taxi jolting, scraping down Bedford Gardens; the honk-honk of a horn as it reached the corner. Then silence. She could hear the tick-tick of her travelling clock on the mantelpiece.

To-morrow she must get up and go about life as though nothing had happened; do some shopping; go and ask Mummy to dine with them to-morrow, their last night before going to Italy. And she would have to get Greaves up here and sort out some clothes. She hadn't even started packing. Then she and Michael would go away together. And she would have to try and be very nice and sweet to him because he deserved it. She would wipe out the past.

She had so little to give poor Michael in return for his

boundless devotion. Why should he have to put up with second-best? It wasn't fair. Nothing was fair. Life was incredibly difficult; the problems one had to face, too hard, too complex for solution.

"Life's all wrong," she cried to herself. "Or perhaps I'm all wrong. I don't know. I don't care."

She turned her face to the pillow—a face all screwed up, like a child's. Through her brain flashed the memory of another time, many, many years ago now, when she had said "I don't care!" to Mummy. And Mummy had said:

"Don't care was made to care, my dear. . . ."

Made to care. *Made to care.*

She thought of Nick, whom she had adored and whom she would never see again—Nick, lying stiff and white and silent on his bed in a hospital ward, not so very far from here. And poor Michael, in the next room . . . generous, loving Michael, looking forward to the future, hoping and believing she would try again . . . that somehow they would regain their lost happiness.

"Made to care," she whispered. "Yes, I *do* care. And I will try . . . I will. . . ."

The tears were rolling down her face as she laid the doll on the pillow beside her, got up, and began to take off her dress.

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